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**THE
ASIATIC SOCIETY OF BOMBAY
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LATH HALL.

FROM A SKETCH BY THE BISHOP OF TASMANIA.

MY HOME
IN
T A S M A N I A,

DURING A RESIDENCE OF NINE YEARS.

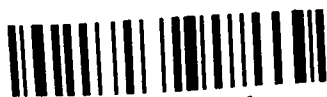
By MRS. CHARLES MEREDITH.



IN TWO VOLUMES.—VOL. II.

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NINE YEARS IN TASMANIA.

CHAPTER I.

Opossums not Sluggish.—My Tame Opossum.—Mischievous Pranks.—
The Opossum at Supper.—Awful Thunder-Storm.—Varieties of
Opossum.—The Ring-tailed Species.

HAVING in my former "Sketches" alluded to the common opossums, which are alike denizens of New South Wales and Tasmania, I need not minutely describe them again, but must beg to point out what seems to me a lamentable error in the account given of their habits in a recent and generally very interesting work*, of which only a few of the earlier numbers have reached us. They are there described as "*sluggish and stupid!*" Perhaps I ought, in the first place, to acknowledge my own former ignorance in calling them "opossums" at all, seeing that the zoologically learned have de-

* "The Pictorial Museum of Animated Nature." London: Charles Knight and Co.

monstrated them to be "Phalangers," as I learn from the work in question ; but it is so hard to know a thing suddenly by a new name, whilst every day brings the familiar use of the old one, by which the creatures are known here, that I fear it will be long ere I learn to adopt readily the new and proper appellation of my old favourites.

And now as to their sluggishness and stupidity. That a poor imprisoned animal, shut up in a small box or cage, fed on unwholesome and unnatural food, and removed to an ungenial climate, where it is never permitted to enjoy the free use of its limbs, may seem stupid, is very possible, especially if only observed in the daytime. When in its natural state, it is always fast asleep in its nest in some dark hollow tree, or coiled up in a thick tussock or bush ; but this same creature, in its own mild climate, and in full possession of its liberty and health, is as far removed from the "sluggish" or "stupid" as any in the whole glorious creation ; and if the unconscious writer of that sad libel could mark, as I have done, the scampering, climbing, and chattering, and the headlong frolicsome gambols of the woolly elves in our forests on a moonlight night, or witness the havoc which

morning shows, after their exploits in the harvest-field, which was over-night as neatly laid out as a newly-set chess-board, he would instantly re-cast his unfair paragraph. At harvest-time they are specially provoking: I have seen one of our fields left in the evening ready for the next day's carting; the rich heavy sheaves nicely set up and "capped" in compact shocks, running in even lines from end to end (and in a "paddock" of thirty acres and upwards, as this was, the sight is a most pleasant one), and I have visited the same field in the morning, to be reluctantly convinced that my favourite opossums were really the mischievous imps they are considered. Scarcely a line of shocks remained as it was, but numbers of them lay prostrate, the sheaves scattered, the bands untied, and the heavy corn beaten and trampled down, partly eaten, and scratched about in woful waste and disorder. The chief scenes of the destruction were within wide circles round several very large dead gum-trees, which had been "ringed" and left to perish (a ring of bark taken off all round causes a tree to die, although the breadth of an inch left entire saves it); and up and down these trees, and among their great bare branches, and round about amongst

the shocks of corn, it appeared that the maddest of the revel had gone on. No doubt the kangaroos had been of the party, and had taken their share in the mischief, but the opossums were pronounced to be the principal delinquents.

I kept one of the common species tame for some months, and know their troublesome activity but too well. One of our servants, when out at night shooting them, killed two does, each having a young one in her pouch, and these he brought to me. They were then about two-thirds the size of an English squirrel, grayish brown, softfurred, sweet-faced little creatures; and I, as delighted with my prize as a child, directly ordered a large tea-chest to be made into a cage, with thin bars, and a door at one side to put them in. As the man went on preparing the new abode, he observed quietly,—

“Ah! ma’am, I ’ve known a many people as kep’ tame ’possums, but never a one as wasn’t glad to be quit of ’em again!”

This, however, I treated as a most unworthy prejudice on the part of our good servitor, and diminished nothing of my zeal for the comfort of my poor little orphan pets. I gave them a warm bed of wool and fresh hay, in which they com-

pletely hid themselves during the day, clasping each other with their paws and tails into one round ball. I fed them with bread soaked in milk, and slightly sweetened, but for the first few evenings I had to give it to them very carefully with a small spoon, not noticing their sharp little claws and teeth; and afterwards they fed themselves, picking a piece out of the saucer and holding it in their fore-paws, which, as well as the hind feet, have the toes so long and slender as to seem just like fingers, and in these little creatures the texture and colour of the skin was soft and fair, quite a delicate pink, like a baby's fingers. They grew fast, and played with each other at night, as well as their roomy cage would permit, and after a time began to eat fresh young ears of corn, grass, parsley, &c., in addition to their constant meal of bread and milk. One day, when I was clipping the thyme-edging of my flower borders, I unfortunately offered them a small bit of it in blossom. One of them refused it, but the other ate a young sprig about two inches long, and coiled itself to sleep again. A friend who dined with us that day, hearing me mention having given some thyme to the opossum, immediately said that it would die, as he had known others

killed in a similar manner. At night, when the cage was as usual carried in from the veranda to the hall, I saw that the one which had eaten the thyme was ill, and would not touch its food; its eyes were dim, its nose hot and dry, and its stomach frightfully distended. My attempts to remedy the evil I had so unconsciously done were all unavailing, and I put the poor little creature back into its cage, hoping, but not expecting, to see it recover; its companion seemed greatly distressed and puzzled by its sad condition, and tried to rouse it up to play as usual, but it grew worse, and in the morning was dead.

The survivor continued growing and thriving well, and soon got so clever as to open the fastening of his cage and let himself out into the hall, as soon as he had finished supper, and then such a scampering and scrambling and leaping and scuffling began, as no decent household, who did *not* keep "tame 'possums," ever heard before! Up the wall, and along the row of hat-pegs, knocking off all the hats and parasols to begin with; then, before you have time to catch a glimpse of the madcap, down he pops, and, with a half-jumping half-cantering sort of run, takes advantage of the

door being left ajar for a moment, to frisk past you into the parlour; then climbing up the back of a chair, he twirls his long tail over the top, and swings by it gently to and fro, looking about him the while with a sly upturned face, till suddenly he takes aim at the sideboard, springs upon that, kicking off anything in his way, such as a stray decanter or flower-vase, and runs round the raised back to the centre scroll-work, where he sits a moment or two, and, while glancing round with his bright, glittering, black eyes, you see he is plotting new mischief, though he pretends to be wholly engaged in combing his whiskers with a fore-paw, or surveying the curling end of that mysterious proboscis-finger-hook-like tail. Some one moves or speaks, and off he flies, with a slide along the piano, and a scramble round the architrave of the door, and there he is, hooked up above it to a picture-frame; dangling again by his tail for a second or two, before that sudden *plop* down to the floor, and the quick scamper up the drawn curtains by his claws, till he secures a safe and unmolested seat on the top of the cornice, whence he complacently surveys all below: and all this in a quarter of the time it will take to read it! Never surely was there such

a beautiful, graceful, innocent-faced, sly, wicked little piece of mischief! If my open work-box were on the table, he made it a rule to spring up, hook his tail to the lid, and straightway upset the whole apparatus, flying before the scattered contents into a corner, and peeping out like a sly, spoiled, half-shy, half-frightened child; or if, determined not to notice him, we sat still and silent, he would sily climb the back of my chair and gently claw my shoulder or bite my elbow; whilst his favourite method of attracting Mr. Meredith's attention was, to bite his toe, or pull the skirt of his coat, and then scamper off to hide himself, only to return the next moment and repeat the game. He stood in some awe of the cat, with whom he frequently tried to establish a pleasant and playful understanding, but in vain. Mistress puss possibly considered him a rival in her share of my affections, and always repulsed his advances very rudely: when she merely clawed at him, he ran away; but if she forgot herself so far as to spit or growl, he instantly turned back, and looked at her very earnestly, as if debating within himself how such an indignity should be received, or whether the offensive demonstrations were really directed to him!

At last we made a rule, never to admit Willy* of an evening, until we were disposed to be idle; for to read, write, or work, with this spirit of fidget in the room, was impossible; and he was restricted to the hall and passage, with a fresh young wattle-tree (perpetually renewed), set upright in a stand, for his especial comfort: this was a kind and clever contrivance of his master's, that our favourite might enjoy something of his native habits, in swinging amongst the branches. Perhaps the drollest thing was, to see him at supper, after he had attained the size of a cat, and was quite independent in his ways and manners. His tree stood close beside the table where his cage and saucer of bread and milk were placed at night, and as he hung like a great live pendulum, swaying about from a high branch, he would stretch out one hand, and, taking a piece of bread, proceed very composedly to eat it, with his head hanging down, and his hind legs uppermost. The sight of my little playfellow swallowing his food in this topsy-turvy style, was enough to give any one a fit of indigestion at least.

Willy fully appreciated the honour of being

* The name used by the natives of New South Wales for the opossum.

admitted to our society, and used to make clamorous demands to be let in, long before the appointed hour, by running round the architrave of the parlour door, and crying angrily from the top; one night, as if to spite us, he contrived to slip into our bedroom unknown to the housemaid, who had orders to keep the door shut. We had missed him for some time, and, on going into our room and looking about, I saw the bright wicked eyes peeping at me over the cornice of the bed, and could soon have dislodged Master Willy; but, as Mr. Meredith had no objection to his company, he remained, keeping up such a ceaseless scamper up and down the curtains, rattling the rings, and scuffling about, that sleep was out of the question, and I feared lest he might jump down on George's cot, and awake him in a fright; so, striking a light, and putting on strong gloves, I watched my opportunity, and, seizing his tail the next time it appeared, I gently disengaged his claws and handed him into the passage, where he grumbled and scampered round the door-case till I fell asleep.

One evening when the weather was very sultry, with constant lightning and distant thunder, Willy failed to make his usual disturbance, and I searched

for him in vain. He had eaten his bread and milk, and was gone, no one knew whither; chimneys, pantry, beds—every place was examined, but no Willy could be seen, and we gave him up for lost, when, in returning along the hall, I saw something long and dark, hanging from one of Mr. Meredith's hats, against the wall; this proved to be Possy's tail, and all the rest of him lay tightly screwed up in the crown of the hat. I would not have him disturbed, and we never heard him move until near daylight. The tempest increased to a fearful height; I never heard so awful a thunder-storm, and the lightning was for seven or eight hours literally incessant; the flashes, blue and blindingly vivid, seemed to come several at once, and the simultaneous peals of thunder were deafening; their tremendous and closely-successive explosions, loudly reverberated by the surrounding mountain tiers, were truly terrific*.

Willy, with animal instinct, had doubtless known that a storm was at hand, and as, if in the forest,

* The aborigines of New South Wales have a great dread of thunder and lightning, and their words for these phenomena are singularly expressive, especially when uttered in their significant and earnest manner. They call lightning "mik'ka" (very short and sharp), and thunder is "moo'rooboo'rooboroy," with a lengthened rumbling pronunciation.

he would have lain quiet in his hollow tree, so, although well housed, he sought a place of close concealment, nor tried any of his wonted vagaries, until the storm had passed over.

Latterly he often opened his cage (which was fastened by a leather loop over a nail), before the time at which it was usually carried indoors; but I felt no apprehension of losing him, as he always cantered into the house, our front door, leading to the veranda and garden, being always open during the day. One evening, the servants were otherwise occupied, and I, having fed Willy in the veranda, forgot him, until after the door had been shut for the night, and then, on seeking him, I found that my "bird was flown," and the cage opened as usual. After this, we almost nightly heard an opossum on the roof, and various things left about, outside, were tossed over, very much in Willy's scrambling style, so that we believed the house to be still visited by its old inmate; but, though tempted with saucers of fresh sweet bread and milk for many nights, he never returned to his old cage: nor, I must candidly own, should I have desired to recover my pretty plague, could I have felt certain he was safe and happy; for I *had* sometimes acknow-

ledged that keeping one "tame 'possum" had given me quite a sufficient insight into their manners and habits in a domestic state.

If any of my readers find this memoir of a pet "Phalanger" somewhat prolix, they must attribute my tediousness to my zéal for science, and my desire to make known whatever knowledge I may possess on this interesting subject: judging from the work before alluded to, which is the only recent book on natural history I have perused, these creatures are not very well known. Should I ever return to dear old England, I seriously contemplate bringing with me a large "consignment" of young opossums, for the especial solace and consolation of such of my friends as are now constrained to pamper apoplectic lap-dogs, asthmatic cats, spiteful parrots, and disgusting apes; confident that, by so doing, I shall confer an inestimable benefit on society in general, and benevolent maiden ladies in particular.

The black, golden, and gray opossums are, I imagine, distinct varieties, although identical in nature and habits. Our barn and stack-yard were often visited by them, and sometimes they came boldly about the house early in the night; one

evening Mr. Meredith shot two very large ones in a wattle-tree within six yards of the kitchen door.

The "Ring-tailed Opossum" of Van Diemen's Land (*Phalangista viverrina*) is a smaller species than the common one, and still more elegant and agile, although I have seen them the size of a full-grown cat. Like their kindred, they sleep by day and play by night, when they hop and swing among the branches of trees with even a greater degree of rope-dancer buoyancy than the others. One which was kept at Cambria some years since, was occasionally admitted to the dining-room at dessert time, and once, desiring to lower himself down over the table's-edge, and at the same time hold on to it, he clasped the end of his tail tightly round the stem of a wine-glass, and boldly swung off, woefully surprised to find his frail support and himself on the floor together.

The ring-tails are gray, the under parts being of a lighter shade than the back, and about two inches at the tip of the tail is white; they seem to possess more sagacity than most of their kind, as they are never caught sleeping on the ground in the daytime, a situation in which so many opossums are killed by dogs.

CHAPTER II.

Wild Cattle.—The “Milking Bail.”—“Mob.”—Sheep-shearing. Harvest.—Wages.—The Bronze-winged Pigeon.—Quail.—Snipe.—Native Hen.—Bittern.—Presents of Pets.

I WELL remember the extreme wonder and amusement with which, years ago, we read in England the accounts of chasing the wild cattle here, and, with something bordering on incredulity, heard of “milking cows leaping five-barred gates like fox-hunters.” I have since discovered that there was no romance whatever in the story, for some of our wild herd here would in the Bush outstrip the fleetest horse; and when “yarded,” that is, put in a stock-yard of massive logs, five or six feet high, would frequently clear the top-rail at a bound. I dreaded the periodical “collecting of cattle,” more than any other duty attendant on the farming operations; suffered great anxiety while it lasted,

and always thankfully rejoiced to see "Master," men, and horses return home without serious injury, after one of their campaigns of a week or fortnight's duration; a station at some distance from home being the usual centre of action. The poor horses rarely escaped being hurt by severe falls, besides being nearly ridden to death. Not that a helter-skelter chase is the method adopted, for, if the cattle are once suffered to start off at the top of their speed, they become perfectly mad, and very little chance remains of regaining them that day at least. The utmost care and skill are required to avoid alarming them; and the grand object is, not to make them run, but to prevent their doing so. Four horsemen are usually sufficient to collect a small herd of two or three hundred cattle.

When near the place where they expect to find a herd, they ride quietly and silently along in "Indian file," through the Bush, and the first person who discovers the cattle gives a low whistle, when all stop, and, observing their position, separate, and endeavour to surround them, but more especially to cut off their retreat into a thicket or swamp, or other hiding-place, where pursuit would be

impossible ; the chief endeavour being to get them into a piece of open country, where the stock-riders can circle them round and round, so as to narrow the space they occupy, and get them to stand, which is the great difficulty, and care is taken not to scare or alarm them in any way. Sometimes one or two or more dart away, and, if not recovered immediately, are suffered to gallop off, as, whilst pursuing them, the rest might be lost. Other "lots" belonging to the herd are collected and joined to these, and the whole driven, or rather manœuvred, in the direction of the station or stock-yard, where the calves are to be branded with the mark of the owner, and steers, cows, and "beef" selected for use. On approaching a "scrub," with only a narrow cattle-path through it, one or two of the stock-keepers ride on ahead to the clear ground, so as to be in readiness to check the cattle when they emerge upon it, otherwise they would again set off at full speed. They are then conducted along, with one horseman ahead, to keep them from going too fast, one on each side, and one behind ; and if this, the proper routine, can be observed, the gathering is thought to be very easily accomplished.

Horses accustomed to the task understand the whole programme as well as their riders, and will pursue a run-away beast through an intricate forest, or avoid the attacks of the infuriated animals, with the most nimble adroitness.

As may be supposed, these wild animals have a strong repugnance to enter a gate, and care is taken, on their approach, to leave all open and clear for them, and to remove out of sight all dogs, people, and everything that is likely to alarm them. I have often seen the drove selected for use, and not considered wild, as compared with many others, brought within a few yards of the gateway leading to our farm-yard several hours before they could be got through it. They would often approach tolerably near, as if about to trot quietly in, when, with a start and a snort, they would burst off, some one way, some another, through the river, into the scrub, "o'er the hills and far away," and the poor weary horses be compelled to gallop furiously after them, till the "lot" was again collected, and perhaps with the same result, again and again. Sometimes a party of more civilized animals were turned out to meet and mix with the strangers, who might possibly be beguiled into rushing in with

them altogether, but this plan would only answer occasionally.

Extreme activity, nerve, and presence of mind are essential in the business of the stock-yard, where fifty or more of these raging creatures are pent up together, and it is necessary for persons to go in amongst them to draft certain of them off, "rope" them (*i. e.*, catch them by flinging a noose over their heads); &c., avoiding, as they best may, the apparently inevitable fate of being impaled on some pair of the entangled mass of horns threatening them on all sides, the only mode of escape being by a leap over the stock-yard itself, when a stumble, or a moment's hesitation, might be fatal.

Some of the cows from such a herd are very troublesome before they can be quietly milked, and it is necessary to have a kind of pillory, called a "milking bail," in which, without hurting them, their heads are held fast, and a leg of the refractory ones tied also, to prevent them from injuring both themselves and the milkman, who, with the aid of this simple contrivance, seldom fails in soon making them quiet. Sometimes they have an incorrigible desire to run away back to the hills, leaving their

calves, and the rich pasture, and a life of ease, to go galloping about with the herd.

“Milkmaids” are out of the question among such cattle as these, so that the pictures, so common at Home, of buxom damsels tripping about with pails and three-legged stools, would find few living resemblances here.

A number of cattle together is here usually termed a “mob,” and truly their riotous and unruly demeanour renders the designation in this case far from inapt; but I was very much amused at first, to hear people gravely talking of “a mob of sheep,” or “a mob of *lambs*,” and it was some time ere I became accustomed to the novel use of the word. Now, the common announcements that “the cuckoo hen has brought out a rare mob of chickens,” or that “there’s a great mob of quail in the big paddock,” are to me fraught with no alarming anticipations.

December being, with us, midsummer as well as Christmas, brought with its warm sunny weather the summer tasks of sheep-washing and shearing. The former part of the business was easily and efficiently performed in a bright running pool in the Swan River; and as we had as yet no suitable

buildings erected for the latter, a temporary boarded floor was laid in a stable, around which the sheep-pens and yards were arranged with hurdles. This brought the busy scene rather close to the house, but in our young establishment we could not have all things fit at first, and I was too well pleased with the progress already made to find room for complaint. Master George was, of course, in a great state of delight, and tumbled over hurdles, got knocked down by the sheep, hugged the dogs, made friends with the good-natured shearers and shepherds, and got in everybody's way with impunity, as long as the, to *him*, charming disturbance lasted.

The lambs of our flock were all shorn at the same time as the old sheep, a far more humane method than that usually practised here; most persons choosing to leave the lambs' fleeces to grow a month or two longer, so as to obtain a larger "clip," thus stripping the poor animals of their warm natural clothing just as the cold autumnal and wintry weather approaches; and, although great numbers of lambs perish miserably in consequence, the cruel and short-sighted custom is still obstinately adhered to by many, to whom interest,

if not humanity, might teach a wiser course. We had the satisfaction of seeing our fat frisky lambs with good warm winter coats on again by the time they needed them, and their healthy lusty condition was an ample compensation for the temporary sacrifice of a few pounds of wool.

Sheep-shearing ended on the 11th of January, and harvest began on the 26th of the same month. Heavy and luxuriant were the crops our new land yielded us, and most pleasant it was to see wide fields of golden grain waving in the sunshine, and rows of sturdy reapers busily plying their gleaming sickles, where, only the year before, we had with difficulty threaded our tortuous way through scrub and forest.

And pleasant, too, was it to see the goodly stack-yard fast filling with the plenteous store, hard by the little spot where our first modest wheat-rick had gladdened our grateful hearts. Now, instead of one small one, five large portly stacks stood in brave array, and the erection of a capacious barn and straw-yard gave the finishing touch to that portion of our farm arrangements.

The extra "hands" engaged for the harvest each received a dollar (4s. 4d.) a day, with the same

unlimited allowance as our own servants, of meat, flour, vegetables, tea, and sugar, and a bottle of wine a day each. To each of our own men, Mr. Meredith gave £2 after harvest, as a reward and encouragement for good behaviour and diligence. These were prisoners, not better than the average; but they were industrious, well-conducted men, who, though under strict discipline, needed not a day's punishment whilst in our service*.

Numbers of the beautiful bronze-winged pigeons frequented our corn-fields and stubble, affording Mr. Meredith a little shooting, in which murderous diversion I must not deny being an accomplice, for, by walking up the lands of the field, I put up the birds, whilst he shot them as they flew over towards the scrub. They are considerably larger than the common tame pigeon, and their plumage is a soft purplish dove-colour, with a reddish glow upon the breast, and the resplendent prismatic hues on the wings from which they are named. In some the preponderating gleam is green, and in others red,

* Wages were at that time high, good ploughmen and farm-servants receiving from 35*l.* to 40*l.* a-year, with rations, &c.; but as wheat was then worth 10*s.* a bushel, and wool 1*s.* 6*d.* a pound, the farmer's prospects were far better than since (1847-8-9), with wages from 10*l.* to 15*l.*, wheat 3*s.*, and wool 10*d.*

but always bright and lustrous, like a peacock's back, or a pearly shell in the sunshine. They have pretty pink feet and ruby-ringed eyes. I have often thought of trying to domesticate some, by rearing them with my tame pigeons; their rich plumage and handsome shape would be very ornamental. A friend of ours had one so tame that it flew about his house, sat on his shoulder, and, when he went from home, would accompany him for a considerable distance, and then fly back again. The poor bird was at last accidentally destroyed, to its master's great regret.

When cooked, the bronze-winged pigeon is excellent, being plump, tender, and well-flavoured, very nearly the size of a good partridge, and here, where those birds are not to be had, is our best substitute for them. The meat on the breast is of two distinct colours, white and brown, in two separate layers.

A few quail bred among the corn, but they are always scanty in number; the native vermin, as well as hawks and snakes, and cats of the domestic breed, become wild, are all terribly destructive to them.

• Before the marshes were drained, snipe were often plentiful in them, but are now very rare.

Our dogs often found a bird commonly known here as a native hen, and chased it out of the scrubs or long grass; but unless a gun came to their aid, they did not often succeed in catching one, for the bird is exceedingly swift afoot. It is, something like a common fowl in shape and size, of a dusky copper-tinged colour, with long powerful legs, and dark, generally tough flesh. It is eaten and relished by some persons when skinned and nicely stewed, but requires good cooking to render it palatable. The noise the native hens make at night exactly resembles that made in setting a saw.

One evening Mr. Meredith was looking for wild ducks beside the river, when a rustling flight from the tall sedges near induced him to fire, and he shot a fine bittern, much to our regret, for we had long known by the strange "boom," heard at night, that we had one for a neighbour, and would not willingly have had it destroyed. Its long fringed neck and crest, and tall slender legs, reminded me of the heron, and, for old acquaintance' sake, I should have rejoiced in having it about us alive. Its plumage is a sober brown, with markings and shades of darker and lighter hues, altogether much

more grave and ancient-looking than the bright array of the blue cranes.

All kinds of wild things used to be brought to me by our servants, for pets, until the very unlooked-for ways in which I disposed of most of them had the desired effect of damping their well-meant ardour in making captures. One man brought me a hatful of beautiful young quail, which he found among the corn, and I felt very much tempted to try to rear them; but knowing that such experiments usually ended fatally for the poor little birds, I contented myself with looking at the lovely, tiny, little helpless things, and had them straightway carried carefully back to the place whence they were taken, so that the old birds might find them again, and, as the young brood was well-grown, fledged, and active, I am fain to hope they did.

Another man brought me a nest of wild ducks, which, by the time he had drank the tumbler of wine I gave him, I had determined to dispose of exactly as I did the quail. A third caught for me a pair of robins, but my love for the bright little birds is much too great to permit me to imprison them, or indeed any others. Birds in cages are

to me most distressing and melancholy objects; I never keep pets that must be so utterly deprived of their freedom; for my pleasure in possessing them would be outweighed tenfold by the sight and knowledge of their unhappiness.



CHAPTER. III.

Green Parrots.—Rose-hill Parrots.—Parakeets.—Snakes.—A Snake Charmer.—A Tame Snake.—Poison-fangs of Snakes.—Lizards.—“Blood-sucker.”—Spiders' Nests.

ONE family of birds may invariably be found in this island wherever there is grain for them to steal, and these are the handsome, merry, impudent, wicked, rainbow-plumag'd, thieving parrots. The common kind, attired in shaded green, with a yellowish breast, and a few blue feathers in the wings and tail, is the most daring and incorrigible. These beset the stack-yard in legions, literally covering some of the

ricks, and terrible is the havoc they commit, clawing off the thatch and scooping caverns beneath, into which they retreat when attacked, and peep out in the most provoking way imaginable, crying continually "cushee—cushee—cushee!"—and, when assailed by volleys of sticks or stones, will often only bob down their round saucy heads, or hop aside to avoid a blow, and go on coolly pecking the ears of corn they hold in their claws, as if the assault were a most unprovoked and unwarrantable one.

They are not deemed worth powder and shot, but may be knocked down with sticks, and when skinned are tolerably good in pies.

All our parrots here have long tails, and are what I should in England have called parroquets. The stuffed specimens in museums, and in Gould's magnificent work on Australian birds, have probably made the chief of them familiar to my readers. The Rose-hill, or Rosella parrot, is the gayest of the family indigenous to Tasmania; the brightest and most positive colours are distributed over its brilliant attire with such startling contrasts as would be unpleasantly gaudy in anything but a bird. Only imagine a lady dressed in a scarlet turban,

green shawl, scarlet and yellow stomacher, green dress (a different shade to the shawl), and long purple train, edged with sky-blue! Yet all these clear and distinct colours are united in this bird's radiant plumage. A group of them daintily pacing about in the sunny garden, climbing among the plants, picking flower-seeds, and performing all the elegant, affected, coquettish antics which only parrots can do, is a sight that well repays me for the loss of many a half-hour which I cannot but waste in watching them.

They are very easily tamed to follow their master about the house, or sit on his hand; but they cannot be taught to speak or sing so well as the larger kinds of parrots: I have never heard any here which are comparable, in point of accomplishments, to the large gray and green parrots I used to know in England.

The most exquisite of all the Tasmanian species is the little green parakeet, which is not much larger than a fat sparrow. Its plumage is of two colours only, green and red, but the green is a living emerald, and the red is like that of moist coral; it is sparingly displayed about the head and tail. A flock of these radiant little creatures

skimming past—for they fly very swiftly, and are much more shy than the larger species—can scarcely be exceeded in beauty by the gorgeous lorries of New South Wales. They appear to live on the honey of flowers, chiefly gum-blossoms, and are very short-lived in captivity, none, that I have heard of, surviving more than a year.

The ground parakeet is a singular species, never being seen to perch on a tree, but always alighting on the ground. Its colour is clear bright green, barred and spotted with black; it is described to me as very beautiful, but it is so rare that I have not yet seen it.

I had feared that we should suffer much alarm and annoyance from snakes at Spring Vale, judging from the numbers destroyed there during the first year of its occupation as a farm; but, with the exception of one found in the stable litter, and two killed in the cellar at different times, we saw none very near the house; and the number destroyed by the men on the farm was not a quarter so large as during the previous year.

A very thick black snake was brought home one day, and, on being opened, was found to contain a nearly full-grown kangaroo-rat, quite entire, all but

the head, which was already digested; the snake was not quite four feet long, and the kangaroo-rat measured ten inches in length, with proportionate girth.

Several well-authenticated instances have been related to me of snakes being killed, which had half-swallowed other snakes very little smaller than themselves, the lower portions of which were in process of digestion in the devourer's stomach, whilst the yet unswallowed half hung out of its mouth. One of these was discovered by a boy treading on it, when, to his horror, the reptile instantly coiled itself round his leg, but without biting him, and, on a person coming to his aid, it was found that the snake's mouth was fully occupied and distended by the body of another snake.

The extreme coolness with which some persons will attack snakes is, to me, perfectly terrible. One of our men-servants had a peculiar talent in this way, and would, after peeping into a snake's hole, thrust in his bare hand and arm, deliberately draw out the deadly inmate by the tail, and, holding it up for a few seconds, swing it round, and dash its head to pieces against a tree or log, with as

much *sang froid* as any one else would crack a whip!

It is said that when a snake is held up by the tail, and gently swung round and round, it cannot turn up its head so far as to bite the hand. I can hardly imagine any one trying the experiment.

Considerable interest has been excited here lately by the wonderful performances of a prisoner named Underwood, who professes to have the power of "charming" any kind of snake, so as to render it gentle and innoxious; and he has exhibited his extraordinary faculty before the Lieutenant Governor, the Bishop of Tasmania, several medical men, and many others of the most intelligent persons in the colony, all of whom bear testimony to his evident power over the reptiles. He handles the most venomous snakes with impunity, tying them in knots, or putting them in his bosom, and suffering them to make their way down over his body, taking them up from the leg of his trousers. All such feats, however, are merely surprising; but he also declares that he possesses an effective antidote for the bites of all venomous reptiles; it consists of "a liquid, a drop or two of which is to be imme-

diately applied to the wound. I believe that its efficacy has been tolerably well tested, and Underwood has obtained permission from the Government to compound and sell his antidote for his own advantage. He says he learned the secret of its composition when at Callao, and would disclose it if his pardon were granted to him in return. Should the remedy prove really as valuable as at present represented, the inestimable benefit it confers on all dwellers in these and other snake-infested countries does indeed demand a most generous reward.

Many years ago Mr. John Amos, one of the oldest settlers in Swan Port, whilst ploughing, with his feet bare, accidentally trod upon a large black snake, close to its head: with admirable and surprising presence of mind, knowing it could not hurt him while in that position, he let go of the plough, and stood fast, whilst the reptile twined itself tightly round his leg and struggled to get away; but he held on stoutly until a knife could be brought to cut off the snake's head, and free him from a situation which very few would have nerve enough to endure, notwithstanding the prudence of doing so.

Differences of taste are proverbially great, but perhaps in few instances more strikingly shown than in the choice of tame pets, some persons patronizing hens, some mice, and some monkeys, and it seems even snakes have their patrons, for Mr. Meredith was once absolutely horror-stricken at seeing an old servant exhibit to him a tame snake, which he kept in an old tea-kettle; and, when desirous of enjoying its company, would take off the lid, put his hand in, and pull out his strange friend as unconcernedly as a boy would fetch out a tame guinea-pig! The precaution of a cork was adopted, to prevent the possibility of the reptile's absconding by going up the spout.

The black snake seems unable to give many mortal bites in quick succession, the venom, as it would appear, becoming exhausted. Some years since a large snake was seen to bite three dogs, one after the other, as they attacked it in turn. The dog first bitten died almost immediately; the second in about two hours; and the third, after being very ill for some time, eventually recovered.

I am not aware how many kinds of snakes infest Van Diemen's Land. Most of those killed come

under the two denominations of "black" and "diamond" snakes, but I have observed varieties in the shades and marking of their skins, which probably constitute several distinct species; both these are sometimes found five feet in length, but more commonly three-and-a-half, and four feet. A smaller kind of snake, of a green colour, is also known, but is less common.

In examining the heads of snakes, the venomous fangs are distinctly visible, two or three being placed together on each side of the upper jaw; and, in a newly-killed snake, they can be raised or depressed with a pin or needle, the bag of venom at their base being also seen. The teeth, when examined with a microscope, appear transparent, with a tube traversing nearly their whole length, and opening on the side, leaving one-fifth of the tooth like a solid point, which pierces the thing bitten, whilst the venom-bag, squeezed by the pressure of the tooth, ejects the poison through the tube into the wound. The mechanism of this terrible weapon of destruction very much resembles that of the spines of the stinging-nettle.

The length of the venomous fangs in the head of a snake which Mr. Meredith destroyed a few

days since was about the sixth of an inch. We were walking over a wooded rocky point above the sea-beach: I had lingered a moment behind, gathering flowers, and was hastening on again, when a very large diamond snake darted almost from beneath my feet; when struck with a stick, and severely hurt, it turned fiercely upon us, with its hideous head flattened out, and its throat distended, looking as nothing but a snake *can* look; unable to reach us, it seized its own body in its teeth, and held it tenaciously for some seconds; then, suddenly loosing, fastened on another part, and bit again in a most savage and determined manner.

Several kinds of little harmless lizards are found here, similar to those in New South Wales; one of them frequented our dining-room at Riversdale, often amusing me, when I have been sitting alone and silent, by its swift movements, and adroit capture of flies on the floor and wainscot, into a crevice of which it disappeared when alarmed.

Another description of lizard is here vulgarly called the "blood-sucker," and is supposed to be venomous, but I think this is probably an error,

the extreme ugliness of the unlucky little reptile being, with most persons, deemed ample evidence against it. Its body is dark gray, marked with black above and white beneath; in shape it is broad and squat, rather toad-like in aspect; both the body and the long tail are rendered somewhat formidable by longitudinal rows of larger scales than the rest, set up like spines. The head of one species of blood-sucker is hooded, of the other, bare, but both are very ugly. They are six or eight inches long. **

Some of our spiders form most ingenious nests of gum-leaves, webbed together at the edges. I annex a sketch*, which I made long ago, from a very pretty nest formed of five green leaves, perfectly closed up at both ends. After I had had it some days, a flock of tiny spiders came out and ran about. I have often, since then, seen what appeared, at a first glance, to be a spider's web scattered full of coarse pepper, hanging to the threads, but the slightest touch transformed the grains each to an active little spider. The two other clever nests, each formed of a single gum-leaf, were also the habitations of spiders. Ground-

* See page 28.

spiders are likewise very numerous, with beautifully-formed cells, in the earth, but they are less often seen with doors to their houses than those of New South Wales.



SPIDERS' NESTS MADE OF GUM-LEAVES.

CHAPTER IV.

Destroyers of Poultry.—Native Cats.—Hawks.—Crows.—Miner.—
Great Comet.—Excursion to the Coast.—View of the Schoutens.—
Oyster Bay Pine.—“The Two Peterses.”—Apsley River.—Pacific
Ocean.—Whaling Station.—Cray Fish.—Return Home.

NEXT to my perpetual horror of snakes, I may rank among minor colonial troubles the annoyance suffered from the various depredators amongst our poultry. Hens which would not sit in the fowl-house, but chose to select their own nests in the Bush, were frequently taken by native cats, and most often just as the young brood was hatched. A trap, baited with some meat of rather high scent, was sometimes successful in catching the delinquent, but as often failed. Hens with young broods under coops were in great danger at night, even though I always took the precaution of placing them close to the house. We well knew, by their cries, when cats were near them, and many

a midnight sally to the rescue took place in consequence. One poor partlet was attacked thrice in the same night; and, being unable to see and shoot the enemy, Mr. Meredith left a lighted lantern in front of her domicile, to prevent further molestation; but in the morning we found she had been so much hurt, that it was necessary to kill her. The thin, wiry, native cat had, apparently, squeezed itself in and out through the bars of the coop.

Cats of the common domestic breed are now wild in the colony in considerable numbers, and are fully as destructive among poultry as the native vermin. One, which had been reared on the farm a demure and respectable kitten, and had taken to disorderly and predatory habits in her mature age, committed sad havoc among my half-grown chickens and sitting hens, and for a time eluded all our vigilance. One evening Mrs. Puss was detected stealing crouchingly along under the shadow of a fence, when a shot from a gun, so often vainly devoted to her service, in a moment cut short her hopes of "chicken-fixings."

The hawks, as a matter of course, rank prominently among my poultry-perils, and I truly

grieve that they are so terribly mischievous, for their noble stately beauty almost disarms one's enmity; and, shameless freebooters and tyrants as they are, I cannot help sorrowing for every one that I see killed.

The common brown hawk of this island is a noble and powerful bird, and, when perched, stands sixteen or seventeen inches high, with an immense span of wing. The plumage of the back and tail is rich hazel-brown, barred with a darker shade, and that of the breast a soft pale tint of gray, warming into fawn-colour, also barred across with deeper hues: very grave, but exceedingly beautiful; a chaste, quiet, tasteful dress, well suiting a bird of his ancient and aristocratic race.

"Old times are changed" for the glorious-eyed bird; in these railroad days, and this matter-of-fact colony, the once favoured of courts, and the caressed of rank and beauty, is simply regarded as an arrant thief and most impudent marauder. Very many were killed at Spring Vale. During one of our morning rambles round the fields, Mr. Meredith shot four; the first was one of a pair, which rose from a dead bandicoot, or other like delicacy on the ground, as we passed. After

shooting another at some distance farther on, two more appeared, high overhead, approaching the place, and Mr. Meredith, having reloaded his gun, flung the dead bird high in the air, when instantly the two stooped towards it, and the two barrels, fired in quick succession, killed them both.

The boldness of hawks in pursuit of their prey is well known, and I have seen them follow our fowls or tame pigeons so close to the house, that, as the frightened creatures darted within for protection, the hawk's wings nearly brushed the door.

The crows, too, were most audacious in their forays for eggs and chickens; the former species of theft I might perhaps have been tempted to overlook, by my admiration for their beautiful sable plumage, and their identity of kind with their English brethren; for, to resemble anything which speaks to me of *Home*, is a royal road to my favour. But after procuring, with some pains and trouble, a set of white turkey-eggs, and after all the cares and anxieties inseparable from the duties of poultry-rearing—after seeing my eight interesting little chickens thriving well, and beginning to chase ants and grasshoppers on their

own account—after all this, could human patience (*feminine*) endure to see one—two—three—four successively pounced upon, and carried squeaking away by the same grave, solemn-looking culprit? So the gentleman in black was one day ignominiously shot, in the act of chasing a young chicken into a wattle-bush, and his body formally nailed to a tree, near which I usually placed my young broods, as a rather pointed moral lecture to his surviving relatives on the fatal consequences of such evil courses.

A very amusing and pretty bird, here called the miner, often assisted us in detecting the hawk, when the latter had taken refuge in a tree out of sight. These miners, or minors (for the etymology of the name has often puzzled me), are nearly the size of a blackbird; their plumage is a delicate French gray, with darker shades on the wings and tail, and a little black cap, and touches of yellow about the head; and their general air and expression are extremely piquant and saucy. They are evidently great gossips, perpetually hunting out and interfering with every bird in the neighbourhood; and a whole troop may frequently be seen chasing a marauding hawk or egg-steal-

ing crow, flying all round in the busiest manner, and uttering their quick, sharp, distinct cry of "Thief! thief! thief!" Their own morals being none of the purest, we might expect them to be chary of abuse; but, apparently, their individual experiences in theft only render them the more alert in detecting the peccadilloes of their brethren, and we have often traced out our poultry foes through their agency.

Their depredations in orchards are really serious, and their impudence is so imperturbable, that nothing short of mortal wounding will scare them from their stolen banquet. A fine bearing cherry-tree, one of our richest prizes from the Cambria orchard, was planted close to one end of the veranda, in the belief that there the fruit would be safe, as persons were constantly passing to and fro; but our busy friends took up their daily abode in it as soon as the cherries began to ripen, and continued to partake of our store, in the proportion of the lion's share, as long as any remained. Yet was it well worth the loss of a few cherries to witness the impudent *nonchalance* of these miners—how they would hop and creep about the branches, and, instead of flying off when

pelted with gravel or shouted at, would pop out their bright-eyed saucy heads from amidst the clustering leaves, and cry "thief! thief!" as loudly as ever, straightway making a fresh onslaught on the fruit with such honest-looking confident assurance, that I almost began to doubt whether they or we were the rightful proprietors of it.

A rather suspicious circumstance occurred one day, not reflecting much credit on the miner as a kind or charitable neighbour. Mr. Meredith, in shooting at a wattle-bird in the top of a high tree, only winged it, and, as it fluttered down, it alighted in a bush, whither he watched it whilst reloading his gun, and then ran to the spot, where he found the wounded wattle-bird fluttering and struggling in the claw of a miner, which would not loose its hold until struck and driven away.

The sudden appearance of the great comet of this year (1843); which we first saw on the 5th of March, was a glorious incident in our somewhat monotonous life here; which, with its ever-recurring digging, clearing, and "grubbing," ploughing, sowing, and reaping, perhaps does tend to make our thoughts savour "of the earth,

earthly;" but this stupendous visitant gave them, for a time, a loftier impetus.

Mr. Meredith determined to measure the apparent length the comet subtended on the sky, although we did not possess a single fit instrument for such a purpose. But not even Sir James South, or her Majesty's Astronomer Royal, ever set about an investigation with more zeal and high resolve! Firstly, there was made, with all possible accuracy, a "cross-staff" and plummet, and thus we proceeded to work:—At night, and when the comet was brightest, with the nucleus just above the mountain tier, we "set up our instruments" (*i. e.*, laid them on a chair), on the lawn. My office was that of worthy Master George Sea-coal, "to bear the lantern," carefully darkened until required. When my better and cleverer half had fairly shot the nucleus, at which he took deliberate and deadly aim with the cross-staff, I brought the lantern to bear on the latter, and marked with a pencil where the thread of the plummet fell; ascertaining the altitude of the extremity of the tail in like learned and scientific manner: and then, after taking the respective bearings by the compass, also aided by the lan-

tern, and repeating the whole ceremony twice or thrice, to test the accuracy of the results, our astronomical observations ended for the night. If not very grave or dignified, the style of the proceeding was infinitely diverting; and, as it eventually proved, some of the greater lights among the learned here were less correct than we and our lantern, for, after the comet's length had been calculated, and published in the colonial papers, to our no small mystification, as 23° only, it was finally declared to be 42° , the same result as that we had arrived at in our primitive method of measurement, which was, of course, highly gratifying and satisfactory.

The popular responsibilities of comets in general are known to be heavy and various, and this being a comet of such vast and startling dimensions, had naturally a great deal to answer for, with some of the simple good people around us. If the sun shone pleasantly out, the comet was bringing "terrible hot weather;"—if a shower of rain fell, the comet brought that too, and would most probably favour us with a flood;—if the hens ceased laying, the comet had frightened them;—if an apple-tree died, the comet had blighted it;—and, whatever

domestic accident occurred, whether a baby cut a tooth, or its mother spoiled a batch of bread, it was "all along of that comet!"

To us its rapid progress was a source of great interest; night after night we traced it, changing its direction, and traversing one constellation after another, waning in brightness as it receded, until first a doubt arose whether we *could* discern it, and then came the reluctantly-acknowledged certainty that we could *not*. We felt as if some friend and companion, who had for a while spoken to us, with stirring eloquence, of the glory of Nature, and of Nature's God, had departed from beside us.

•Mr. Meredith had long projected an excursion to show me the river Apsley and the eastern coast north of Oyster Bay, about thirty miles distant from Spring Vale; and this year, after harvest, we arranged our little plan, which involved the necessity for an absence from home of two nights. I fabricated for myself a nondescript kind of valise or knapsack, to hang over the pommel of •the saddle and fasten with the girths, which contained, in marvellously small space, the essentials for a travelling toilette, besides a pocket telescope and

sketch-book; and, mounted on the gentle and beautiful Arab dedicated in her old age to my especial service, I set forth with Mr. Meredith, on a fine autumn afternoon early in March, to cross the tier, and remain the night at the house of a settler eight miles on our way, so as to enable us to reach the coast and return thither the following day.

On the verge of our own land we passed the cottage and busy blazing forge of our tenant the blacksmith, whose forty acres had yielded him a good return; and a bonny wheat-stack, a well-filled garden, and oxen, poultry, and pigs in plenty, made a pleasant show of homely comforts all about it. Beyond this, the road entered on the property of the Amos family, who deserve honourable mention at the hands of any chronicler of this island, as being among the best farmers it contains. I know not any spot here which so vividly recalls to my mind the scenery and character of an English village, as the group of homesteads and the surrounding cultivated land occupied by different members of this family. The substantial buildings include several good houses (now embosomed in Home-like gardens), a large water-mill on the bank of

the Swan River, barns, and all other requisites ; and the strong neat fences, in many places lined with thick hedges of sweetbriar, the perfectly-cleared and well-farmed land, and the air of abundance and comfort pervading the whole, form a most striking contrast to the slovenly, improvident style of farming prevalent in some other parts of the colony.

Shortly after fording the river, we began to ascend the hills, over which a very rough and stony track passes, certainly not worthy to be called a road, as by all, save colonial travellers, it would be pronounced totally impassable.

We gained a few very pretty peeps of wild mountain scenery, wherever the dense forests around afforded an open vista ; particularly a foreshortened view of the Schoutens, which was very beautiful, with a foreground of densely-wooded hills and ravines glowing in the full-golden radiance of an afternoon sun. In due time we crossed a "saddle" of the tier, and began to descend again, traversing some very wild and picturesque glens and gullies, where the "Oyster-Bay pine" flourishes in great luxuriance. This species of tree is only known within a well-defined boundary, of about forty

miles from north to south in this particular district ; it is not found either northward of the Apsley River, or south of Oyster Bay, or in any other explored part of the island. It is a very handsome tree, not so densely verdant as the "scrub" or "brushy pine" before described, but much more lofty and picturesque, and so perfectly straight and taper, that the larger trees resemble the entire mast of a vessel, from deck to sky-sail. The lower branches curve downwards, and turn up again, with a most graceful bend ; the cones are small, each consisting of four or five hard scales, and a few small ones between them ; they grow in clusters, sitting close to the branches, and their polished dark brown shells are beautifully conspicuous amongst the vivid green foliage.

Although known here universally as pines, yet I imagine that both this tree and the "brushy pine" belong to the cypress family. Some of the largest grow to the height of from 90 to 120 feet, but the average size varies from 30 to 80 feet. They are found on the most rocky hills and gullies, and, being useful for many purposes, are much thinned in the more accessible regions. As I did not penetrate beyond these, I have not seen the finest

specimens, but the common road-side groups of them are very beautiful. We frequently sent men and teams into the tiers for pine spars to make ladders, rafters, fence-rails, &c., and, when sawn and well laid, they make excellent floors.

Emerging from this region of woods and glens, we came out at the head of Moulting Bay (so named in days of yore, when swans were abundant), and reached the house which was our night's destination. It commands a fine view of the ever-grand Schoutens, Great Swan Port, two conspicuous eminences called "St. Peter" and "St. Paul" (or more commonly "the two Peterses"), and various other hills and inlets.

We set forth again early the following morning, and cantered briskly along through thick woods of gum, pine, and wattle trees, and then, climbing another rugged stony hill, came in view of an extensive lagune, a drained flat of rich land, formerly a fresh-water marsh or lake, but now chiefly under cultivation: the owner of it has a good house-garden and farm buildings on the slope of a hill commanding a fine view; also a large orchard, producing a hundred or more hogsheads of cider annually.

The next pleasing object in our landscape was the river Apsley, a deep, clear, beautiful river of fresh water, which, if it went on its way like other orderly rivers, and rolled its waters onward to the ocean, would be of the greatest advantage to the neighbouring settlers in shipping their produce; but, after running for a considerable distance of sufficient depth to float a frigate, it suddenly makes a full stop, and finishes off abruptly in a low flat, over which, when floods occur, the superabundant waters flow into the bay, and the river itself is no more seen: the produce of the adjacent farms has thus to be conveyed some miles overland to the east coast.

The striking change in the outline of the hills as we advanced, gave quite a different character to the scenery here; instead of widely-spread sloping hills, fine wooded ridges of most picturesque form, and with almost precipitous sides, bounded the prospect in every direction. Many bright flowers enlivened the Bush, among which the most conspicuous were, the large crimson epacris and a small snow-white-blossomed "tea-tree" (*Leptospermum* — ?)

We soon reached my father's sheep station on

the Apsley, where the overseer in charge had a considerable quantity of land cleared, neatly fenced, and under cultivation. His barn-yard displayed some comely stacks of wheat, the produce of the recent harvest; and his cottage, garden, goats, pigs, poultry, and a swarm of sturdy, healthy, shouting children, made a pleasant busy scene to greet us after our quiet ride through the silent, wild, primeval forests.

Being anxious to achieve our chief purpose of reaching the sea in good time, we declined for the present the hospitable offers of the overseer's wife, but promised to call on our return; and, again plunging into the forest, journeyed on as usual along a bush road, which after some distance quitted the dark "trap" rock we had hitherto travelled over from Spring Vale, and entered upon a range of granite hills, comparatively low in some parts, but rising in others to a considerable elevation. From the last of these we gained a view of the magnificent Pacific, which truly then deserved its name! It was pure intense blue, even to the beach, where the little waves rippled on fine sand, white as driven snow. This beautiful beach extended for a distance of many miles along the coast, only interrupted

by crags and huge heaped-up masses of granite, sparkling like gems in the sunshine, as the transparent blue waves broke in endless dazzling succession, and the feathery spray flew high over the rocks.

Long high headlands stretched away to the north, in the vicinity of the river Douglas and St. Patrick's Head, and a bright bare granite island, called Diamond Isle, lay almost close in-shore. The creeping plant called here the "Macquarie Harbour Vine," spread its long chaplets of broad verdant leaves in a thick net-work over the high sand-bank above the beach, together with the common *Mesembryanthemum* (known here as "pigs' faces") and a few low green shrubs, vividly contrasting with the more sombre tints of the lofty mountains behind, all thickly clothed with wood, except where some grotesquely-shaped granite mass protruded in the form of an ancient tower or rampart.

We dismounted and walked along one beach in the hope of finding shells, but saw scarcely any; then rode over an intervening point to another beach, when we left the horses tied to a shady tree, and enjoyed a scramble amongst the rocks, which were very beautiful, exhibiting great variety of colour and

crystallization : in some of the masses were cubes of red felspar nearly two inches square, with equally large scales of mica ; in some places the granite contained schorl, and was covered with large black patches of that mineral. A very minute red lichen clothes some of the rocks so completely as to appear at first their natural colour, whilst numbers of the bright deep little pools among the crags were gay with many-coloured sea-weeds ; vivid green, rose, crimson, purple, and other less showy hues floating together, gay and changing as a living kaleidoscope. Some of the Algæ were new to me.

Remounting our horses, we rode on over another point, to another beach, close to which a spring of pure fresh water rises in a green grassy hollow, and here Mr. Meredith unsaddled and tethered the horses to graze, whilst we sat under a scrubby old honeysuckle tree, and comfortably discussed our own luncheon, in as lovely and lonely a spot as can well be conceived. This important matter satisfactorily disposed of, we again rode forwards and southwards to "Wabb's Boat Harbour," where a granite island lying very near to the main-land affords shelter to the narrow channel between them, which is much frequented by the small vessels visiting this part

of the east coast to receive the corn, wool, and other produce of the settlers*.

This little harbour of refuge being the only shelter in a stretch of many miles of rocky coast, it is often occupied during the winter as the station of a whaling establishment, although at the period of our visit all was silent and deserted. Skeletons of huts and skeletons of whales stood side by side, and with greasy barrels in long and black array, and remains of putrid carcasses steaming in the sunshine, formed one scene of dirt, desolation, and disgust, contrasting powerfully with the clean bright crags, snow-white beach, and the pure brilliant character of the surrounding scenery.

As we looked over the rocks into the still deep water of the little strait, great numbers of cray-fish were seen clawing about amongst the floating kelp, rather provokingly, for we had no means whatever of catching any, and they are particularly nice, although I suppose they act in the capacity of sea-scavengers in this place, their presence here in

* The recent discovery (1849) of a coal-field, supposed to be of great extent, near this place, will no doubt speedily effect a great change in the aspect of the neighbourhood, especially if the promised Government tramroad be formed, for the conveyance of the coal to Wabb's Harbour for shipment. A company has been formed for working the coal, and operations are expected to begin immediately.

such quantities being, at the least, suspicious. They resemble the lobster in flavour, size, and shape, except that they are destitute of the large claws, and the back-shell is very rough with sharp tubercles; their colour is a dull dark red, which becomes the common lobster-red when boiled. A string with a piece of raw meat, or even a bit of red rag, is a sufficient decoy to bring the cray-fish to the surface, when they must be seized with the hand and pulled out. They are plentiful in many parts of the coast, where the water is deep and still, with a rocky bottom.

Bidding a reluctant farewell to the blue Pacific, we turned homewards, traversing a better road than we had done in coming, the decomposed granite forming a fine white gravel path across the hills.

On arriving again at the overseer's cottage, we found the unfailing mark of hospitality—a steaming tea-pot of gigantic capacity, ready to give us welcome. The good wife had been busy too, making that favourite bush dainty, a “fat cake,” which was hot and brown, and of a most savoury and unctuous smell, although rather too rich for my inexperienced palate (its composition being that of pie-crust, with abundance of dripping or “fat” kneaded into it,

and then being made about an inch and a half thick, it is baked slowly in the frying-pan); but the nice bread and tea were very acceptable, and we discussed those, and all matters connected with the farm and the garden, and the large family of small clean sturdy children, at the same time.

We reached our resting-place of the previous night about sunset, and rode home the following morning, two nights' absence from our little boy seeming to me a scarcely excusable act;* and divers visions of perils from nursery-fires, snakes, ponds, horses' heels, and cows' horns, had begun to haunt me most reproachfully, when, as we neared the gate, the joyous little voice came ringing forth to greet us, praying for a ride before me on "old Dainty," which being duly granted, our pleasant little excursion was happily ended.

CHAPTER V.

Garden laid out.—“Water laid on.”—Heavy Gale.—Itinerant Threshing Machine.—Spring and Summer Flowers.—Acacia.—Eucalyptus.—Epaeris.—Native Lilac.—Lilies.—Stylidium.—Orchidæa.—Sun-dew.—Native Rose.—The Tea-tree.—Berry-bearing Shrubs.

ALTHOUGH our new garden had been planned, and many trees planted in it, even before our removal from Riversdale, it was not neatly and artistically finished until the June of the present year, 1843.

A great lightwood tree, very green and well-formed, grew at the lower end, and a drain, through which a bright clear stream always flowed, traversed one side; the banks were well planted with raspberries, currants, stone-fruit trees, and nuts, whilst in nice moist corners we cherished some weeping willow cuttings, and encouraged a few groups of the elegant white-blossomed tea-tree to grow up in kindly companionship with the strangers.

The valuable gifts we received from the paternal orchard at Cambria included the finest kinds of

grafted fruit trees of all sorts, many of them bearing well, so that even before our garden was finished it yielded us fruit, and at once assumed a pleasant and promising aspect when made neat and trim : the walks, smoothly laid, and sown with English grass-seeds, showed green and fresh, and in fancy I saw the China-rose cuttings I had carefully planted *vis-à-vis* beside them at intervals, grown up into verdant and blooming arches and bowers. But my speculations on the future glory of our garden were suddenly checked by a tremendous winter flood, or rather two successive floods early in July, which caused the rivers to overflow in new places, and drove a raging roaring torrent directly through our neat, precise, and just-completed garden.

Among minor losses and troubles, I do not remember one which ever annoyed and grieved me so much as this. We had been so long striving to achieve what we now saw ruthlessly destroyed, that my eyes grew dim with positive tears, as I stood watching the resistless stream come sweeping on, driving the stout paling fence before it, bending down and uprooting tree after tree—plum, and peach, and apple—and washing off whole beds of vegetables and flowers. Finally, after surging

heavily for some time against the ponderous dead-wood fence at the bottom of the garden, it burst the massive barrier, which it flung open on either side like great gates, and rushed uninterruptedly onwards to the Swan River. About the middle of the flood, we saw the "seed-lift," which the man sowing had left the day before in a wheat field nearly a mile distant, come sailing along over the drowned flower-borders, till it lodged in the boughs of a cherry tree; and this told very plainly that the work of destruction was carried on to a still more serious extent elsewhere. We afterwards found that eight or nine acres of rich ploughed land had been washed away out of one field, and three acres out of another, leaving the unploughed subsoil smooth as a floor.

Two of our men-servants, with their wives and one child, lived in a cottage about half a mile from us, on a little plot of land which they cultivated for themselves, and on which, at the time Mr. Meredith measured it for them, not a trace or vestige of flood or "wreck" was visible, such indications being always accurately observed in choosing a building-site; but during this terrible inundation (the highest known here for nineteen years), the

water rapidly rose round them, leaving the cottage awhile as on an island, until towards night, when it flowed over the floor, and, all retreat to the higher ground being cut off, the men proceeded to set up a kind of perch or rude platform in the nearest tree, upon which they hoisted their few stores and clothes, and then helped the terrified women and child up also, the woman who had no child carrying her favourite cat with her for safety; and thus they passed the dismal night, water rushing and roaring all below, and the rain still pouring heavily down.

Late in the evening, our shepherd, in taking his last circuit to see that the sheep were safe, hailed the two men from a distance, as he saw them wading about, with the help of long poles, and learned something of the state of affairs, although the noise of the water prevented his comprehending much that they told him. Both of the women had been my servants, one being the nurse who was so much affected when "Bill" was "up a tree" in the former great flood, and I was truly concerned to learn that she was now "up a tree" herself; but no aid could be safely afforded them until day dawned, and the waters fell, which they did during the

night, so that the poor, wet, cold creatures contrived to make the ever-comforting "pot o' tea" before daylight, and soon after were able to re-enter their soppy dwelling, which their dog had never quitted, having made himself as comfortable as circumstances would permit on the top of the bed-place.

After the flood had wholly subsided, and we could again walk about, we found that the Swan River had risen between twenty and thirty feet above its ordinary level, and that several spots which we had formerly thought of as sites for our cottage had been overflowed to a considerable depth, and heaps of wreck, huge ponderous trees, and pieces of fencing, left on the banks at a scarcely credible height above the usually placid river. My poor garden was long ere it recovered from the devastation, and the necessity of making another broad drain through it, and of laying down a portion of the borders in a long grass-plot, to prevent future floods from carrying away the soil, considerably affected my favourite plan.

Not long after this watery desolation, we were visited by one of the most furious gales of wind I ever remember, and as Mr. Meredith had started

for Hobarton the day previous, and was then travelling through the Bush, where, in such a tempest, trees are continually falling, and huge limbs of others are rent off, and driven about with terrific force, I felt no small degree of apprehension on his account. So many reports of damage done around our own homestead poured in upon me, that I resolved to sally forth and superintend the preventive and remedial forces in person, though sorely buffeted and breath-spent in the attempt.

The barn displayed a miserable appearance; the thatch, rent off by yards, left nothing but bare rafters between our threshed corn and the threatening skies; and the mischief, so far from abating, was still making rapid progress. All the stacks were likewise stripped "to windward," and partly ripped open; pig-sties, stable, cowsheds, calf-pens, and all such buildings, perfectly neat in the morning, exhibited now a most dishevelled and deplorable condition; whilst fences blown down in all directions, laid the corn-fields open to the forays of horses, sheep, and cattle. Many and ingenious were the contrivances proposed and put in practice to arrest the injuries on all sides, the gale raging with unwearied vigour and intensity until nightfall,

when it moderated a little, and relieved my apprehensions lest the house itself might be unroofed.

When, from the state of the markets or other causes, it becomes desirable to thresh corn out speedily, we young farmers, who have not yet erected a threshing machine, are obliged to hire one of those which are kept to go out to work in most districts (the "char-women" of their species); those who employ such assistance paying three-pence or fourpence per bushel for all the grain threshed, and furnishing twelve men and some or all of the four horses required in the operation, which must be hard and weary work for the poor animals; and I always rejoiced when the business was over, and the deafening, clattering, factory-like din, and the suffocating clouds of dust, subsided together, and the great reeling rumbling machine rolled away from our peaceful home.

The month of November is the chief season for our Tasmanian wild flowers, and consequently the pleasantest time of the year for a ramble in the "Bush," and our many long wandering walks made me acquainted with various new faces among the delicate and fragrant denizens of our woods and meadows:

The notion that our flowers have no scent is as ridiculous as the idea that our birds have no song ; both assertions must have been made by people too much prejudiced to admit the natural impressions of their senses. Without enumerating the less conspicuous blossoms of the colony, there is the wattle or acacia tribe, contending species multitudinous, and *all* fragrant, if English hawthorn or meadow-sweet be fragrant, both of which they resemble in perfume, and are, like them, almost too strongly scented to be pleasant for any length of time in a closed room, although out of doors the rich odour is most delicious. All the *Eucalyptus* family bear an abundance of bloom, in constellated wreaths of starry flowers, sweet as the rich honey which the labouring bees suck from the crystal stores that lie deep within the fringe-bordered cups ; and as you pass a tree full of blossom, the fragrance it diffuses seems to hang around so lusciously as to be almost palpable to taste as well as smell.

The *Epacrida* are here usually called heaths, although we have not any true heaths in the island ; all of them bear honey-laden flowers of sweet scent, but not very powerful. The lovely *Epacris pulchella* is well known in English green-

houses, and the crimson and white varieties are scarcely less beautiful, growing as they do here in such lavish abundance.

A little purple flower, which is equally common, so vividly recalls to my mind, both by its scent and colour, an Old-World favourite, that I always know it as the native Lilac (*Tetralthea juncea*). The flowers have four petals, partially closed, so as often to give them a bell-shape; the stamens, united in a spire, are black or nearly so; the flowers form pendulous clusters of six or eight; the foliage is small and hard, and the slender stems are from six to eighteen inches high. It grows in every part of the colony with which I am acquainted, and flowers in November and December: I have sometimes found specimens nearly white, and some pink; but the usual colour, and the universal scent of this lovely little flower, are those of the lilac blossoms.

Another very fragrant flower is the common white lily, *Diplarrhæna Moræa*, which is as universal a guest here as the daisy in England, but more especially occupying rocky gravelly banks, where its great tussocks of long reedy leaves flourish all the year round, and in the spring and summer are

abundantly adorned with the elegant white flowers. These are much of the Iris form, the three larger petals snowy white, and the small inner ones delicately tinted with yellow and lilac. Each lasts one day only, but they appear in a long succession, emerging singly or in pairs from the sheath, which terminates the long slender stalk, where the little buds lie closely hidden, like shy young birds, till fully fledged to flutter and dance in the breezy sunshine.

Our children always exult in the first bunch of lilies they can find for me, and bring them home in great triumph. The lilies are our true heralds of summer, and seem to me the most generous and loveable of all our wild flowers.

The sadly prosaic, dull, matter-of-fact habits of mind, and apathetic want of observation, which characterize so large a proportion of colonial young people, are to me lamentable, and we guard against such habits in our own children as we would against the symptoms of some mortal distemper of the body, at the same time offering perhaps the best antidote in the shape of our own opposite habits and active interest in all things around us.

One day, very long since, whilst engaged in

drawing one of our commonest wild flowers, with the name of which I was then unacquainted, I accidentally made a discovery, which seemed to render my botanical immortalization inevitable, until, shortly after, I found that my new wonder had been known, printed, and published in England years before! The flower was the *Stylidium* (*graminifolium?*), and whilst sketching it, I gently raised the singular central column of one blossom with my pencil, in order to examine its form more accurately, when, the instant it was touched, it leaped over to the other side of the flower, as if I had suddenly moved some hidden spring which previously confined it. Greatly surprised and interested, I touched the columns of all the other blossoms, and all performed the same jump with greater or less vigour; and, believing in my simplicity that what was so new to me must be also new to every one else, I was prepared to receive the honours due to my wonderful discovery, until a chance reference to page 1480 of "Murray's Encyclopædia of Geography," published in 1834, nipped all my vain aspirations in the bud.

The *Stylidium*, or, as we named it, the "Hair-

trigger," is common all over the colony; the flower stem springs from a low tuft of grassy leaves, and grows from a foot to eighteen or twenty inches high, the upper half of it being adorned with purplish pink flowers, which succeed each other during several months in summer.

Many very pretty orchidaceous flowers dwell amidst our woods and wastes; among these the golden *Diuris* holds a conspicuous place, with its singular long-petalled bright yellow flowers, grotesquely marked with rich brown, and, as they are viewed in different positions, may be fancied to be dragons' heads, snakes, or nondescript creatures with long horns and beards. *Diuris umbellata* has darker amber blossoms, also clouded with patches of brown.

Some of the *Thaladenias* are yet more fantastic; one, viewed in front, always reminds me of the picture of an ancient court jester, with a tall conical cap, gay crimson doublet, and long party-coloured legs; but I never could persuade any one else to see more than the likeness of a spider in this odd little flower. Other species of *Thaladenia* are pale lavender colour, pink, &c. One small kind, very delicate in form, and daintily shaded

pink and white, has an unpleasant odour very similar to that of mutton-bird feathers.

I have often found the curious little *Neottia Australis*. The stem is ten or fifteen inches high, with one or two small leaves at the base, and a multitude of little bell-shaped flowers without foot-stalks, circling closely round and round the twisted stem, corkscrew-wise, to the top; each flower being partially sheathed in a curving green leaf or bract; the tiny bells are bright pink outside, and white within, with a pleasant but slight odour, like new hay. In the same meadow where this little beauty dwelt, I have also found an eccentric relative of an old Home friend, namely, the forked-leaved sun-dew of Australia (*Drosera binata*?).

Every one knows the common English species of the sun-dew, with its rosette of round leaves sitting close to the soil, and sparkling like a cluster of little rubies, as the light glistens on its dew-tipped crimson fringe; but its Tasmanian cousin is totally the reverse of this compact character. The plants I have gathered have usually six or more leaf stalks springing from the root, of from two to six inches long, the leaf seeming merely a continuation of the stalk, divided into two thin portions, forming a fork

of one or more inches in length, and the whole greatly resembling in shape an old bent pitchfork with a crooked handle, for the leaf stems have always some twist or bend in them. The forked leaf is richly adorned with the fringe of crimson threads and sparkling dew-jewels peculiar to this curious family of plants; the young leaves first appear like closely-curved tendrils; the flower is white, very similar to that of the English sun-dew. In the bright pools of the Cygnet River I have seen the plant growing much more luxuriantly than on land, the flower-stalk being a foot and a half high, and the leaf fork three inches long.

On the banks of these same bright pools, too, dwells the loveliest of all the Tasmanian flowering shrubs, the *Banera rubiæfolia*, more commonly known as the native rose. Its clear green foliage is nicely disposed in starry circles round the slender waving stems, and the exquisitely-delicate flowers which appear among them are something like a wild rose or apple-blossom in form, but are smaller and far more airy and slender in character; whilst the closed, round, red buds are the prettiest little coy green-hooded fairies imaginable. The flowers are a soft rosy pink, passing into white towards

the centre of each petal, and the anthers are golden yellow. After gathering a few sprays of the native rose, I always glance around, and rarely in vain, to find a Tea-tree, and straightway pil- lage its snow-laden pyramids of some dainty little branches, which form a lovely contrast, in their chaste lily-like purity, with the blushing little rose.

The tea-tree (*Leptospermum*) blossoms may be somewhat likened to those of hawthorn, in their individual form, although longer; but, instead of being grouped in detached clusters, they form tall continuous pinnacles of flowers, most graceful in form and motion, and charmingly enhanced by the rich myrtle-like foliage and the scarlet-brown tints of the sepals, shown between the bases of the white petals.

Grouped with these is often seen another handsome shrub, which I used to call a Yellow *Metrosideros*, but is, I believe, the Crested *Calistemon*; its great bottle-brush flowers of pale yellow, and its long sharp-pointed leaves, show well beside the more delicate proportions and tints of its gentle neighbours.

The steep rocky banks of the rivers, as they

recede among the mountains, produce many beautiful shrubs, which are wholly absent from the more level parts of the country. Our pretty Cygnet River often afforded me a treat in the discovery of some new flower. One, which we especially admired, was a species of *Hovea*, a long, scanty, scrambling kind of shrub, with a very large proportion of stem, and only the terminal sprays adorned with much foliage, the leaves being small, oval, and of the darkest green, with a rusty down on the under side; but the clusters of small papilionaceous flowers were of the loveliest pale lilac or French gray colour, with an eye of deep violet, whence slender veins of the same hue went wandering over the whole flower. We were at great pains to remove some of these plants, but they grew in such wild craggy places, and with their strong iron-wiry roots so knotted round and amongst the rocks, with no apparent soil near them, that the task was a somewhat tough one; and of the four we succeeded in detaching, only one, planted in a hole in the rocky bank by our cottage, survived the removal.

Many of these mountain shrubs are more beautiful in their seed-time than whilst in flower, as

their berries are very ornamental. One very prickly bush bears inconspicuous little greeny-white flowers, succeeded by quantities of berries, the size of currants, but painted like peaches, shaded and tinted with the brightest and clearest hues, with a soft tempting bloom on them; but, alas! the beauty is to the eye alone! The apples on the Dead Sea shore are not more deceptive in promise than my pretty peach-berries of Tasmania.

A very handsome shrub, or small tree, the *Notelia*, bears glossy bright berries of a rich morone crimson, deepening to black; the leaves of this shrub are also beautiful, being long, and of a deep, rich, polished green. Some species of *Leucopogon* bear transparent berries, called native currants, but none of all these are good to eat.

Wandering among my favourite river-side dingles and dells over again on paper is so pleasant, that for my own part I could very complacently loiter on, until every leaf and blossom I loved were duly presented to my readers; but, remembering that paper and ink can make at best but a sorry description of my bright sweet flowers, and their wild, still, beautiful dwelling-places beside the rip-

pling river, or under the cypress shade, I must leave them, although reluctantly; for I would fain show how wondrously fair they are, and how possible it is to enjoy their beauty, and the beauty of much more in this favoured land, without a thought or dream of the horrors and terrors, and other uncomfortable inventions, which it seems customary now to associate with the idea of poor Tasmania.

CHAPTER VI.

Improvements.—Fishing.—Water-fowl.—Bush-rangers.—Who's there?—Domestic Security.

OUR pleasant little home had assumed a tolerably civilized aspect by the summer of 1843-4. The principal rooms were plastered and finished; the veranda erected along the front was by this time partially hidden by roses, native clematis, and other plants; the garden was thriving and productive; and behind the house, on the same bank, stood a goodly barn, surrounded by other farm-buildings. A granary was built of wood, supported some feet from the ground on thick posts, in the vain hope of excluding the destructive little mice from the corn; but in an incredibly short time they infested it, as they do every building in the colony, and I think to a greater degree than in England, our mild climate here no doubt favouring their more

rapid increase. Even our fields abound with the little creatures, and in barns and stacks they literally swarm. Rats I have heard of as having been seen here, but am happy in not yet having myself made their acquaintance.

Among other of our improvements, a rampart of huge logs and an embankment were raised, to defend the garden, in future, from the devastating sweep of the river-floods, by restricting the entrance of the water to a certain breadth, and preventing the wide tearing rush of the torrent: to shut out the flood was impossible, but the spread of the still water did comparatively little mischief, especially after the main track of the floods had been laid down with English grass-seed, which in time made a firm sward, and saved the soil from being washed away and scooped in holes.

Our bright rivers often yielded us a nice dish of fish, for which, however, we were most frequently indebted to the skill and patience of some of our servants, not being ourselves much skilled in the "gentle craft." When we did make an onslaught among the delicate trout that abounded in the Cygnet's crystal pools, I much suspect our proceedings would be pronounced positively heretical

by any proper orthodox angler. Walking across the verdant grassy marshes (*Anglicè*, meadows) to the Cygnet River, each armed with a "stick and a string," and some lean raw mutton for bait, we selected our several pools, some of which were as much as four yards across! George being stationed beside his papa or me, we began to bait and bob; our rods being sticks, four or five feet long, and our lines not much longer.

The chief charm consisted in our being able to see distinctly down into the pool, and watch every movement of our finny victims; and great was the excitement when, from amidst the waving shelter of some long-tressed clustering water weeds, the round head and winding body of a wriggling eel would glide into the sunlight, and manœuvre round the bait among the lesser fry, which instantly lost value in our eyes, as every energy was devoted to the capture of the greater prize, the achievement of which won a shout of delight from George. The trout we usually caught were a small species, from four to nine inches long, and very nice and delicate. A larger and less firm kind of fish, called "Black fish," was also numerous; but these seldom began to bite until after sunset, when the mosquitoes

began to bite too, so vehemently that I could not remain after that time. Poor little George's bare legs were terribly attacked, and we were thus driven home just as the proper fishing time approached, for our men always began to fish after dark, lighting fires on the banks of the large pools in the river, and often remaining out half the night, having excellent sport.

Fine bream abound in the lower parts of the Swan River, where the salt water prevails, and a small delicate fish, called "cucumber fish," from its peculiar odour, is sometimes found in great abundance in the rocky pools and basins higher up towards the mountains.

Of the water-fowl of this colony, many species, like the poor swans, have been so much destroyed and disturbed as to be almost exterminated in most of the settled districts; we rarely see more than a few wild ducks or teal in a season, although formerly every lagoon teemed with them, and with legions of bald coots, but the latter are now so rare, that I have not yet seen one. The musk duck is a large, heavy, beautiful bird, of dark sombre plumage, pervaded with a strong scent of musk; of these I have seen two only, and those were dead.

The mountain duck is a magnificent creature, with the clear blue and chestnut brown of the kingfisher, added to all the bright metallic hues of its other plumage. Sea-eagles, gannets, gulls of various species, pelicans, divers, shags, cormorants, kingfishers, and other aquatic birds, frequent most rivers and inlets in greater or less abundance, in proportion to the populousness of the vicinity, and the disturbance they suffer.

In December, 1843, our then new governor, Sir Eardley Wilmot, paid Swan Port a passing visit, in a tour he made on the east coast, and I, a true lover of my native Warwickshire, naturally felt more than common interest and pleasure in welcoming one so well and deservedly esteemed at home, to our lowly abode in his new dominion. Another connecting link seemed woven at once between my new home and my old one; little did we then dream it would be so soon and so cruelly broken!

Several parties of bush-rangers excited considerable alarm about this time, and some of them came into our immediate neighbourhood, robbing remote shepherds' huts of food and clothing, and attacking other dwellers in lonely places. One night, or rather morning, about two o'clock, a violent rap-

ping and thumping was heard at our kitchen door, and of course the first half-dreaming thought was of "Bush-rangers," although they are not in the habit of besieging houses exactly in that style. Nevertheless, a parley was held (with bolted doors), and the noisy visitor proved to be a settler from a small farm about three miles distant, whose cottage had been ransacked, and himself and servants "bailed up." As soon as he could escape, he ran to warn us and other neighbours to be on our guard against his lawless guests, who were, he supposed, still lurking about. The fact, well known around us, that plenty of loaded fire-arms were always kept ready for use in our house, may have preserved us from like disturbances.

For several months at this time, ominous rumours were constantly floating about, of the deeds and desperation of these marauding parties, most of whom, it appeared, were making their way towards our neighbourhood, in the belief that they would be able to seize and take off some of the coasting vessels, which were always trading to and fro, or lying at anchor at Swansea or Wabb's Harbour; but no abduction of the kind took place.

A small party of soldiers was stationed on our

farm, as being a central situation, whence all the upper portions of the district were readily accessible, in case the robbers were again heard of; but no opportunity occurred for the display of their military prowess, although the persevering activity they exhibited during their abode at Spring Vale, in the capture and demolition of eggs from our poultry-house, gave us a most impressive conviction of their foraging capacities.

During this season of alarms, Mr. Meredith, who had been detained at an out-station, was returning home on a Sunday morning, and called at the house of a settler on the way. He found the doors closely shut and fastened, and knocked stoutly for admittance. Presently a face appeared at a window, and, beside the face, there peeped out also the muzzle of a double-barrelled gun; whilst, from within the door, a voice, accompanied by the peculiar click of cocking a pistol, demanded "who was there, and what was wanted." The peaceful cause of this warlike display being instantly admitted, was ushered into the family sitting-room, where morning prayers had just been read, and on the table (round which the old gentleman and his wife and their patriarchal assemblage of sons and

daughters and grandchildren had been seated) lay, side by side, bibles, prayer-books, guns, pistols, and an old yeomanry sword: it was like a meeting of the Covenanters of old. A report had, as it appeared, reached them that morning, that a most daring and notorious fellow, whose name had been the terror of the whole country population for months, had been seen near their house, and hence the preparations for defence in case of an attack, which, however, was never made.

Fortunately this unpleasant condition of things was not destined to continue. A new chief police magistrate arrived, in the person of Mr. F. Burgess, and, in an incredibly short time, his active vigilance and well-organized system of pursuit effected an entire change; so that, instead of parties of armed absconders being tamely permitted to harass the defenceless country settlers for months and even years together, their escape was so rapidly and invariably succeeded by their recapture and punishment, that the terrors of bush-ranging became absolutely almost forgotten in the colony; and at the very time when the ridiculously-exaggerated accounts of our lost and outraged condition were being diligently circulated at Home, every country

house in the island, however lonely, was in far less danger of molestation and robbery than those of any English city. How well I remember the nightly preparation at Home, the fastening and barring of shutters, locking, bolting, and chaining of doors, sticking up of spring-hung bells, and all the elaborate defences of English houses, both in town and country! whilst the loneliest dwelling here has neither shutter nor bell, the French or sash windows are merely closed with hasps, and the outer doors with a single bolt; and on many occasions our lower windows have been left open, and the front door unfastened all night.

It seems doubly hard on us, not only to suffer the odium of receiving the majority of England's felons here, but also to have the credit of keeping them as worthless as we get them; and, so far as one small voice may serve to disprove it, I am by no means disposed to let the false and injurious impression continue dominant. True it is, and must be, that, out of the many thousand convicts sent hither, some do remain wholly incorrigible; but, for each one of such, are there not scores of good, willing men, who, thankful for the opportunity afforded them here of leading a new life, and en-

joying in abundance all necessary comforts, are quiet, orderly, industrious, and trusty servants? If this be not generally the case, then we must have been singularly fortunate; but I believe the old axiom, that "good masters make good servants," meets with more corroborative cases here than elsewhere. The low mean spirit which loves to domineer over and taunt its fallen brother with the perpetual upbraidings of his errors and degradation, does more than check his onward struggles towards amendment—it drives him forcibly back, and perchance further on the road to perdition than he ever went before.

CHAPTER VII.

Unwelcome Changes.—Preparations for Removal.—A Dripping Guest.
Our "Family Carriage."—A Conjuror.—Departure.—Passage over
the Tier.—"Hop-pole Bottom."—Economy of Government Of-
ficials.—Mount Henry.

I HAVE before alluded to the heavy and calamitous losses which the almost universal insolvency in New South Wales, and the unprincipled conduct of persons whom we believed trustworthy, had inflicted upon us. For a time we had ardently hoped, and earnestly striven, to remedy the consequences; and, had the prices of farm produce continued even moderate, we should, probably, have succeeded; but wheat at 2s. 6d. a bushel was a sorry help to remove mortgages at 10 per cent.

Reluctantly—most reluctantly—did we at last acknowledge the necessity for some new plan of exertion; but having once resolved, we lost no

time in endeavouring to carry out our determination. Our kind friend Sir Eardley Wilmot offered Mr. Meredith the police magistracy of a newly-formed and remote district: it was accepted thankfully; and, just as the pretty and loved home of our creation was assuming an appearance, and a reality too, of comfort and completeness, and all the rough and arduous work of a new place was merging into mere pleasant cheerful occupation, we were destined to leave it to the care of a few small tenants, the farm servants and overseer. Unsettled as our former life had been, we had taken up our abode at Spring Vale with the comfortable feeling that *there* our wanderings had finally ceased, our weary way-faring ended. The conviction that all was about to begin again, came upon my heart with most sorrowful and dispiriting anticipations; I felt as if there were some evil spell upon us, dooming us always to go on wandering, as if for us earth had not a home.

Our new settlement was to be in a district called Port Sorell, of which previously we had scarcely so much as heard. We found that it occupied the central portion of the north coast, about

150 miles from Swan Port; and its sea-side vicinity was a potent charm in reconciling us to our migration thither.

Mr. Meredith set out to enter upon his new duties in the beginning of May, leaving me at Spring Vale with our two children. My husband's letters descriptive of the new country were indeed discouraging: the scenery, except that on the sea-borders, was one vast dreary forest—damp, dark, and dismal; the inhabitants, with a few exceptions, miserably poor, so that the contrast to our comfortable and substantial neighbours of Swan Port was somewhat striking. Another unpleasant peculiarity I soon perceived—that of the extreme wetness of the climate, for every letter I received, whether one or more reached me in a week, contained some similar paragraph, such as, "The rain has not ceased for four days;" "It is raining heavily;" or, "I have just come in, wet through." The place seemed to be the constant scene of a partial deluge.

The impracticability of a winter transit for our children and myself, and the difficulty Mr. Meredith found in procuring a residence for us, combined to delay his arrangements for our removal; and at the end of June he came home for a brief

visit, and again returned to Port Sorell, without being able to end, as I had hoped he would, my lonely sojourn in single uncomfortableness. Most dreary were the long winter evenings, which had never seemed long before, and perfectly intolerable were the floods, when they prevented my receiving the "post."

My chief occupation was the gradual packing up and removal of our goods and chattels down to Swansea, in readiness for the vessel which was to take them round to Port Sorell, and as the winter rains rendered the roads and rivers often quite impassable, and always nearly so, we could only cart down small loads at a time. Accordingly all articles not essentially useful, such as pictures, &c., were first taken down and put away in cases, then most of our books, and by degrees every piece of furniture that could be spared, until the baby was put to sleep first in a drawer, and, when the drawers departed, in a clothes-basket.

Towards the end of August, when I was in daily expectation of Mr. Meredith's arrival, to take us back with him to Port Sorell, one of our terrible floods arose; the inundated lowlands became, as usual, one vast lagune, and the raging rivers

swept angrily along in swollen rapid torrents. Knowing that the streams on the inland side of the mountain-tier frequently show no indication of rising, even when ours are flooded, I feared greatly for my husband's safety, as he could not arrive near home before late in the evening, and then might rashly venture into danger. I had scouts out until after dark, and the head shepherd, a faithful old servant (albeit formerly a *prisoner*), went wading across the flooded lands, up to his middle in water, hoping to meet or hear his master, so as to assist him; but he at length came in, satisfied that no one who knew the place as Mr. Meredith did would attempt to cross the flooded Cygnet that night; and I tried to persuade myself that it was so, although more than half inclined to feel cross with the good man for giving up his watch, and very much disposed to go forth in the pelt-ing rain and resume it myself, when the noise of a finger lightly tapping at the window sent me in one bound to the door, where, wet and dripping as a merman, stood my own good man!

Instantly the whole quiet household was joyously astir; and when the streaming guest had been

all comfortably arrayed and refreshed, he told his story, as benighted wanderer should. The whole country was partially under water, and the Cygnet River formed a wide outspread stream, with several deep channels, and broad intervening shallows, all which he had to traverse in the dark, on foot; it would have been impossible to ride, as he trusted to his memory of certain fallen trees to aid him in crossing some of the channels. In one or two instances, after cautiously wading to the spot where he remembered a fallen tree-bridge, it was not to be found, except by *probing* the gully with the pole he carried, when the log was discovered two or three feet under water: at length the last deep channel was crossed, the inundated marsh splashed through, and he gained our terrace-like bank.

As one preparation for our transit, a strong easy vehicle, something of the jaunting-car genus, an invention of Mr. Meredith's, which had been some time in progress, was now quickly completed, and fully answered our expectations. The seat, a *dos-à-dos*, and very roomy for four persons, being made movable, to shift on the body, according to the number conveyed, enabled the weight to be always

placed centrally over the axle; and this arrangement, with four excellent springs, and high wheels, gave an easy uniform motion like that of a good Stanhope, instead of the agonizing spasmodic shaking to and fro of the cars commonly in use here, which have only two springs, and are the most perfect instruments of torture conceivable. The springs and axle were procured from a good coachmaker, the body was very neatly made and painted by our own carpenter; a neighbouring blacksmith and wheelwright, who was quite an artist of a Vulcan, made the wheels and remaining ironwork, and put all together; whilst the cushions displayed my proficiency in the upholstery department: so that our "family carriage" was truly home-made, and did us all infinite credit; not the least useful part of it being a large square box, fitting in beneath the double seat, and capable of containing a very tolerable travelling equipment for our party. All Long Acre could not have furnished us with a conveyance so well adapted to the service we required; whilst its perfect originality, and the curiosity and diversity of opinions it excited, were infinitely amusing. Its first appearance in public was on the occasion of our farewell visit to Cambria,

when the rivers were still almost dangerously high ; but our stout tandem, good horses, and skilful driver overcame all obstacles.

An itinerant conjurer, who was engaged to perform before the party in the evening, afforded our George the extremest delight. He, unsophisticated child of the Bush, had never beheld anything of the kind before, and gazed with fascinated astonishment, as each respectably ancient piece of legerdemain was exhibited, clapped his hands with joy at the disclosure of the impromptu pancake, shouted aloud when a cauliflower tumbled from his papa's hat, and contemplated the fire-eating process with a comical mixture of curiosity and horror ; but the climax of his mystification and amazement arrived when the pistol, which George had *seen* properly loaded with a ball, was deliberately fired in the necromancer's face—and, coolly taking the bullet from his mouth, the marvellous man showed it, slightly flattened, to the spectators ! Poor little boy ! I began to debate within myself whether such a blissful state of ignorance deserved more my commiseration or my envy. Not that *I* was an uninterested witness of the good old tricks ; they were too pleasant, as reminders of bygone

times, and my own childish wonderment, to seem at all despicable now.

Returning home the following day, our final arrangements were made, and next morning we set forth from our dear cottage-home, to cross the mountain-tier to the north, in order to get into the main road to Launceston. Our party consisted of Mr. Meredith and myself, the two children and nursemaid in the car, our old house-servant on horseback, and several others to assist us over the tier.

For the first five or six miles our road was comparatively good; we then reached a ford of the Swan River at the foot of the hills, where a saddle-horse was waiting for me; George also was mounted before one of the men on horseback, the baby carried by another, whilst Mr. Meredith and a third led the tandem horses, with the nearly empty car, up the steep ascent. After a fatiguing climb of several miles, we paused for a few minutes on a high point of the mountain range, whence we gained a last beautiful farewell view of the grand Schoutens. We then continued our journey over rough abrupt masses of rock, varying from the size of a waggon to that of a

hat-box, heaped together in one chaotic wilderness of mounts and ravines, thickly covered with both growing and fallen timber.

By about three in the afternoon we had accomplished the descent of the mountains, and forthwith prepared for dinner. The horses were taken out to graze, a fire made to leeward of our grassy dining-table, and our commissariat unpacked, which contained a cold turkey, ham, cakes, wine, &c., and we brought that best relish, a good appetite, to the banquet. This over, the supernumeraries from Spring Vale and the horse I had ridden over the tier turned again homewards, and we journeyed on, through bogs, logs, mud-pits, and quagmires, as we best might, in a hollow denominated "Hop-pole Bottom," which, being full of deep holes of water and fallen timber, was perilous to traverse, after so much rain, and amply tested the safe qualities of our stout vehicle, and the strength and docility of our good horses.

In this valley, the first sign of a human abode we had seen since passing the Swan River greeted us in the shape of a large assemblage of huts and other buildings, almost like a village, erected for the accommodation of a Probation road-party, who

the neighbouring settlers innocently expected would have made the fearful track we had traversed conveniently passable; but, according to the usual custom of the late Comptroller-General, the convicts were ordered for removal elsewhere, so soon as all the expense of building their abode had been incurred by the Government, and without their being suffered to become useful, as they might and ought to have been in this and many other places: thus affording another notable instance of the obstinate reckless obstructiveness of the officer in question.

"Mount Henry," a hill of picturesque outline, but provoking situation, lay before us, and our road, or rather track, made four-fifths of a circuit round it, affording us a long series of monotonous views; "Mount Henry" being to us, as Salisbury Cathedral was to Mr. Pecksniff's pupils, the object of contemplation from all points of the compass. The short twilight ceased ere we approached our destination for the night, which was the cottage of a friendly settler acquaintance; but after manifold groping examinations of fences, in search of an entrance gate, we at length succeeded in making our way on foot into a ploughed

field, and thence to the garden gate, not without being in some jeopardy from the numerous dogs of all kinds and sizes, which our nocturnal invasion had aroused to full vigilance and wrath. Our kind reception within-doors seemed doubly pleasant after so rough a salutation without, and the hospitable attentions of our good friends were not a little enhanced by the fatigue and difficulty of our past day's journey.

CHAPTER VIII.

Saint Paul's Plains and River.—Bog.—Ben Lomond.—Sojourn at the
"Stony Creek."—"Deoch an Dorich."—"Eagle's Return."—
Coaches.—Great Western Tier.—Perth.—Approach to Launceston.
—Sojourn there.—Arrival at Carriek.—Old Water-mill.

THE first part of our next day's journey was through a beautiful valley, between fine ranges of wooded hills, one of which, from its high round form, is named "Saint Paul's Dome." Our road lay along the opposite declivity, overlooking the vale, with its snug farms and cottages, green lawn-like fields, and the bright winding river ("Saint Paul's River") outspread in fair array below us.

We had frequently to get out of the car, whilst Mr. Meredith drove it over some dangerous gully or steep ravine, and then, with his and the manservant's help, we scrambled over too, and reseated ourselves; but as sometimes we were obliged to seek for logs or stones, to build a foot-bridge or

make stepping-places over brooks or creeks, these interruptions greatly delayed us. One most horrible black morass spread out before us over a length and breadth of some acres, rendering any avoidance of it by walking over utterly hopeless, and, after a brief contemplative pause, Mr. Meredith urged the horses straight on. In they plunged, nearly up to the shafts, in a sable sea of something very like bird-lime; and I cannot now remember, without horror, my (by no means, groundless) dread lest we should be smothered, or that the traces should break, as the good horses dragged, and struggled, and floundered on; but at last they rose again upon the hard ground, and pulled us safely out.

As we drove pleasantly along "Saint Paul's Plains," fully appreciating the comfort of hard firm ground, albeit sometimes rough with rocks, my attention had for some minutes been engrossed by the graceful outlines of the distant hills on our left, and in watching the changes of effect caused by the passage of clouds across the sunlight, when, on looking again to the right, I involuntarily uttered a cry of astonishment and delight:—beyond a sort of promontory, in which one hilly



BEN LOMOND, FROM ST. PAUL'S PLAINS.

FROM A SKETCH BY THE BISHOP OF TASMANIA.

range abruptly ended, had arisen, as if by enchantment, a living picture of the snowy Alps! a distant lofty expanse of crag, and battlement, and peak, all white and dazzling in silvery snow, amidst which the steep sides of some mighty buttress-like rocks showed black as jet, and the deep blue unclouded sky crowned this glorious scene; which, I suppose, was yet the more charming to me as being wholly unexpected. My new mountain friend was the Tasmanian Ben Lomond, the lordly chief of a great mountain group in the north-east of our beautiful island.

We drove on, still along the plains, with no living thing near us, save the wild birds and some scattered sheep; the grand snowy mountain changing, but not waning, in its stately beauty as we proceeded. Soon after midday we halted in a little isolated grove of trees, affording both shade from the sun and shelter from the wind (which sweeps keenly across these wide plains), and also yielding us some dry firewood, a bright fire being, whether needed or not, an indispensable part of a bush bivouac. I contrived to gain time for a slight hasty sketch of Ben Lomond before the order for our onward march was given. For foreground

there was the wide plain, only varied by a few stray straggling trees, and one or two indistinct tracks across it; beyond, ranges of hills, covered with sombre forests, rose dark and abruptly, and above these the snow-clad summit of Ben Lomond rested against the clear blue sky.

Changes of the same landscape accompanied us in the afternoon, until near the lonely inn where we intended sleeping; and, just as we had alighted to walk down the steep rocky bank of the "Stony Creek," we heard a hearty joyous cry of "Here they are! Here's the master!" and two of our own servants, who had gone with a cart-load of our trunks and bedding to Campbell Town, and were staying a night at the inn on their way back, came running to meet us, ready to carry the children, or lead the horses, or draw the car themselves, if it would benefit us, all eager alacrity and good humour.

On the top of the high bank, and facing another high hill which rose before it, stood the narrow tall brick house, which rejoiced in the sign of the "Deoch an dorich" (my Gaelic is most probably ill-spelt). Being very new, the sepulchral odour of fresh plaster was rather pre-

dominant within, varied at intervals by a gush of fragrance from yet more recent paint; and the parlour was drearily cold and cheerless, fire never having been as yet introduced to the new hearth, whilst all entrance of sunshine was carefully prevented by a grenadier regiment of tall geraniums and fuchsias, trained and woven upon high triangular wooden ladders, reared against the windows, apparently with the laudable purpose of enabling the flowers to peep over the opposite hill; the lower panes being also defended by an outpost of spiteful prickly cactuses, forming a compact *chevaux-de-frise*. Still, when the chimney had smoked its best to dislodge us, and finally given up the attempt as hopeless, and a blazing fire in some measure thawed the icy vault-like atmosphere, we found our quarters by no means despicable, especially when the customary dinner-tea-and-supper meal overspread the ample table, and the pleasant fumes of tea and coffee overcame even the damp plaster and fresh paint.

"Mine host" of the "Stirrup-cup" did us good service the following morning, by accompanying, or rather preceding us, on horseback, to show us a way through the Bush by which we could

avoid a notoriously dreadful boggy lane in the neighbourhood. We had still some unpleasant "creeks" and watercourses to traverse, but all were easily passed, and soon after noon we, to our great joy, emerged on the fine main road, and felt all difficulties at an end for a while. Sitting on the bank, we discussed our luncheon, and then smoothly and merrily drove along the hard broad metalled road through Epping Forest to the Snake Banks, where we halted for the night at a very good comfortable inn, with the sign of the "Eagle's Return" on the signboard; and in a duplicate copy over the door of each room, the same design appeared, representing an eagle pecking at a very bare bone. What hidden meaning might be attached to this picture, I am not aware, but the feeling it naturally excited was one of compassion, that the noble bird, whose "return" seemed an event of some interest and importance, should not have found better fare to welcome his arrival.

Whilst the waiter was bringing in dinner, I observed him endeavouring to drive something out of the room, and thinking it was our spaniel, I said, "Do not drive the dog out, let him stay."

"Oh! ma'am, if you please it's our missis's tame jackass, and he's sometimes so rude, he gets upon the gentlemen's heads; I'd better put him out, if you please, ma'am."

But the jackass did not seem inclined to be so easily dismissed, and I had the pleasure of his amusing company for some time. Talking a little, and hopping about a great deal, the poor bird appeared very happy, and was equally entertaining. It had perfect liberty, and flew in and out and all about the house at pleasure; sometimes chattering upon the banisters upstairs, and then flying out to hail the arrival of new guests.

The bird so ridiculously named a jackass is about the size and shape of a starling, with dark shaded brown plumage, and, being easily reared and tamed, is often kept as a pet; it learns to whistle tunes, and to say a few words tolerably plainly, and is a merry sociable bird when allowed its freedom, as this one was, which seemed quite a popular character in the establishment.

The arrival of the mail and other coaches was a great event for George, to whom the whole busy affair of changing horses was a most amusing novelty; and I confess I was far from an apathetic

spectator myself, for the bright handsome vehicles, the good horses, and orthodox-looking guards and coachmen, were all pleasant lively reminders of Home, although now, I fear, almost obsolete there. The substitution of hideous smoking steam-engines, dark tunnels, and sooty stokers, for the gay, brisk, well-horsed coach, is, in my mind, as unpleasant an offering upon the altar of utility as the equally-prevalent change from beautiful graceful sailing vessels to clumsy thick-chimneyed sputtering steamers. The saving of horse-torture would, however, be a weighty argument, with me, in favour of steam and iron, were not the luckless omnibus and cabhorses driven more furiously and mercilessly than ever, in consequence of the generally-accelerated speed of travelling. Doubtless we far-off colonists are apt to think of English railways with feelings a little embittered by the unnecessary fatigues and deprivations we suffer here, from the lamentable mismanagement of an amount of labour which, if wisely and honestly directed, would leave us little to envy, in the item of roads, in any country. But in the present state of things, the contrast is tryingly great, between English people at home, for whom jour-

neys on turnpike roads like bowling-greens are now too tardy and difficult, and English colonists here, who (except the few residing near the one main road) have little else but mountain and bog in a state of nature to scramble over, whether for business or pleasure; so that the most amiable of us cannot restrain an occasional growl, or a wish, however bootless, that the despised turnpike-roads of the mother country could, like other despised and condemned things, be transported hither as a bequest to her daughter.

We left the Snake Banks after a night's sojourn, and drove on to Perth; the whole of the land on either side being inclosed for sheep-runs, farms, pleasure-grounds, and gardens, with pleasant houses and cottages seen at intervals, and my grand favourite Ben Lomond lifting his snowy head above all the eastward scenery. On our left lay a wide extent of inclosed and cultivated lowland, dotted with houses and settlements, beyond which the great western range of mountains stretched in a long dark shadowy chain of snow-crowned peaks and wide bleak moorland heights, which may be considered as the vertebræ of our Tasmanian mountain system, which sends out limbs that

traverse most of the eastern half of the island, and almost wholly occupy the western. Embosomed in these dreary mountain wilds are several large and beautiful lakes, of whose lonely grandeur and picturesque scenery I have heard their explorers speak in terms of high admiration; and in the summer, numerous flocks of sheep are sent to depasture in the grassy valleys and lowland in their vicinity.

We entered the flourishing town of Perth on the south-east, over a handsome stone bridge of eight arches, with bold stone parapets, and quite an imposing aspect, more like a good old English bridge than the usually flimsy colonial constructions, which seem for the most part built on the principle of children's card-houses, for the pleasure of seeing them tumble down again. The broad rapid river, the signs of population and industry on its banks, the many good finished buildings around, and many more in progress, gave a pleasant cheering aspect to the place; and during the hour's halt we made at one of the inns, whilst the horses rested, we walked down, after luncheon, to the bridge, to sketch and look about more at our leisure; we then drove on to Launceston.

' After living for five years in the "Bush," and having a personal acquaintance with nearly every human being we were in the habit of meeting on the road, and almost with every team of cattle, I found quite a childish amusement in seeing so many new people, new horses, and new vehicles of all descriptions, as we approached the town. Neat suburban cottages, veritable "cottages of gentility," with coach-houses complete, abounded by the road-side, with their strips of garden and smart green gates. Carts full of cut wood were travelling townwards for sale, a sure indication of our advance towards a denser population. Brewers', bakers', and other trades-peoples' errand carts were jogging about; waggons nodded drowsily along, loaded with the furniture of hapless people, "fitting" like ourselves; gigs, pony chaises, phaetons, and Irish cars of all kinds, all full of people, in spruce dresses, driving briskly to and fro, mingled with numerous equestrians of all grades, and divers quadrupeds being led forth towards Campbell Town, in readiness for a grand "hunt" on the morrow.

Nor were we, whilst observing, unobserved. Many a curious glance and earnest stare were bestowed

on our original turn-out; the good horses, correct harness, and clever character of the whole, rather enhancing the interest awakened by the novelty of our carriage itself, and the family group it contained, with our handsome little dog gravely looking out in front; and then the wandering eyes next rested on our short stout old servant, in his new suit of velveteen and tall shiny black hat, with his shot-belt and double-barrelled gun carried rather defiantly than otherwise, and mounted on a horse too tall to be easily ascended in haste: altogether, we must have borne unmistakable evidences of our country rearing, and I can only hope that we proved as amusing to the good folks we met as they did to us.

From the brow of a hill down which the road passes into Launceston, we commanded a full view of the town and adjacent "swamp" (as it is, for a miracle, rightly named). Dense fogs are so prevalent in this ill-situated place, that I believe there are not many days in the year when this view can be enjoyed; the usual prospect which awaits the expectant traveller on this spot being a rolling mass of thick white vapour, below which, as if at the bottom of a mighty steaming cauldron,

lies, he is told, the populous town of Launceston, which, as we saw it unveiled, with its shipping along the wharf, and the far winding river lying bright in the sunshine, formed really a very pretty picture. The beauty, unhappily, is only perceptible at a distance, and on entering the town vanishes entirely amidst the dirty streets, where the handsome churches and other buildings, and good large well-stored shops, are interspersed with mean squalid hovels, unpleasant even to pass.

We found roomy apartments prepared for us at a quiet hotel, and took up our abode there for two or three days, Mr. Meredith having business to arrange. The portion we occupied had been added since the original building of the house, and, from some contrivance or whim, the windows of our drawing-room, which were not above a yard high, rested nearly on the ground, so that the only comfortable way of looking out was by sitting on the floor beside them, a mode of proceeding much more congenial to George's tastes than my own.

So far we had had no choice as to our mode of transit, but now the question arose, whether we should go on the remaining sixty or seventy miles by land, or take a passage in one of the little coast-

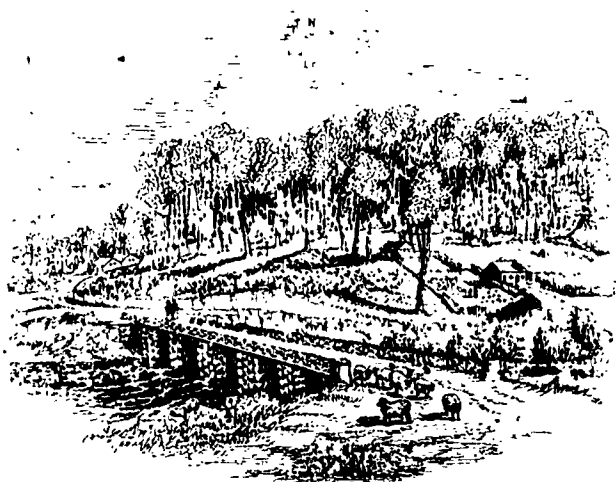
ing vessels, and ship the car with us, sending the horses overland, the way, for *road* there was none, being deemed by every one but Mr. Meredith as totally impracticable for the tandem. *He* said he could drive over it, having carefully noted all the difficulties in his former journeys, and gave me my choice. In furtherance of my decision, we went to the wharf, and looked down into two of the Port Sorell vessels: they were very small, very dirty, and gave out such a potent compound odour of stale tobacco, grease, and bilge water, that I stepped back and gave my casting-vote for a land progress; thinking that even a night's lodging in the forest, under or within the hollow trunk of an old gum tree, would at any rate be a cleaner and sweeter kind of penance than an incarceration, perhaps for a week or more, in either of the cabins I had peeped into.

Accordingly, our business being ended, we remained no longer in Launceston, but gladly drove out again on the third afternoon of our sojourn, though half drowned in a pelting thunder-shower which fell just as we started; and, after a boggy progress for ten miles, we stayed for the night at the little village of Carrick, where we found the neatest of all

possible inn-parlours, and the prettiest and most obliging of all nice amiable landladies (a colonial Mrs. Lupin, with teeth and eyes that a duchess might have envied), and were as cosy and comfortable as we could desire.

Having an hour's daylight to spare, Mr. Meredith took me down the muddy road to see an old mill of which he had become enamoured in his lonely journeys this way; nor was I at all disappointed in it. All buildings in these new countries are so completely the things of yesterday, and generally look so glaringly and obtrusively new and discordant amidst the surrounding scenery, that it is especially pleasant to see anything of human work which has really mellowed into something like an harmonious character, and so this crazy old weather-board mill won its way to our admiration. We stood on the rather frail wooden bridge which the road crosses, and looked up the narrow rocky bed of the stream, which came foaming and chafing down towards us, overshadowed in many places by graceful bending trees, and an infinite number of lovely flowering shrubs, growing on the steep banks and little islets of the noisy turbulent river, the "Liffey," a tributary of the Meander. A portion of the water turned

aside a short distance above these rapids was conveyed along a wooden trough, supported on stout tall mossy props, which displayed an infinite variety of angles, according to their respective lengths and the inequalities of the ground. This "lead" brought the water to the mill, where it poured down in a glassy sheet on the dark shining old-fashioned overshot wheel, that brought to my mind the many old water-mills I had loved to loiter beside at Home; and, as the vexed stream flowed onwards, lodging its creamy wreaths of foam on the rushes as it hurried along, it seemed like the strange links of a dream, to unite the long-ago with the more recent scenes of my life; till it rushed madly down a little ravine, and tumbled again into the parent stream, carrying all my retrospective romance along with it, and leaving me ready to walk back to tea. Since my visit a tall, sharp, grievously-neat, new mill has taken the place of the picturesque old wooden building, and I am thankful that I am never likely to pass through Carrick again.



DELORAINÉ BRIDGE.

CHAPTER IX.

Westbury.—Delorainé.—Wooden Bridge.—Bottled Ale and Porter.—Hospitality.—A New Friend.—Last Day of the Pilgrimage.—Avenue Plain.—Crossing the Rubicon.—The Forest.—Mid-day Halt.—Leech.—Night Ride.—Difficulties of the Road.—Safe Arrival.

LEAVING our neat inn and our pretty hostess after breakfast the following morning, we struggled on through the quagmire roads as we best might, sometimes waiting whilst the servant rode on ahead to fathom the depth of any very threatening bog before we ventured into it, but generally trusting to good driving and stout horses to pull us through.

A bridge over the South Esk had a toll-house and gate upon it, and this would have been a pleasant scrap of Old-World ways had the road in the vicinity been worth paying for; but as, on the contrary, it appeared to me that we deserved rather a handsome premium for enduring the risk and misery it involved, the charge seemed adding insult to injury.

The snow, which lay thick and white along the higher ridges, gave a piercing keenness to the bleak southerly wind, as it blew aside cloaks and shawls and furs; the poor children looked pinched with cold, through all their mufflings, and we were glad to sit by the inn fire to thaw, when we stopped for a few minutes at Westbury, a watery, dreary, muddy place, and the coldest part of the island I have yet visited.

The roads became gradually but evidently worse as we approached the forest. Often I thought we must relinquish the idea of taking the car further, and travel on upon the horses in the best way we could, but still we advanced, and before evening reached Deloraine, on the river Meander.

We passed through a great part of the settlement, which, with its recently-erected raw brick and wooden buildings, has very much the character of

the ugly irregular suburbs of some fast-growing manufacturing town, with square patches of ground fenced for gardens, but as yet producing little besides a scattered crop of brick ends, old mortar-pits, and sawdust, with here and there a huge black stump remaining unburned, to tell of the departed forest.

A singularly picturesque wooden bridge crossed the Meander here, formed of several piers of logs supporting the causeway, each of the piers being built of even logs laid crosswise in a square, partially bedded into each other at the corners, but leaving space between each so as to offer less resistance to the water when floods occurred. The causeway and railing of the bridge were considerably out of repair when we crossed it, but the ponderous piers had every appearance of stability; and the river was then considered very high. Since then a heavy flood of rain came, bringing down immense quantities of fallen trees from a neighbouring "clearing," which blocked up the openings of the bridge, and the tremendous weight of the timber and the body of impeded water behind it entirely carried away the whole fabric. It has been replaced by a new one, which I have not seen.

Close to the bridge was our destined inn, a square red-brick house, looking older than most others in the settlement, and the property of its landlord, a tolerably wealthy man, but who, finding his circumstances thriving, and his inn receiving abundant custom, seemed to think all improvement in attendance or refinements in accommodation wholly unnecessary; yet he practised genuine liberality in the *stable* department—a golden virtue in country innkeepers. .

A good fire was our first desideratum on our arrival, and then, being warmed, we requested to be fed. A large round table stood in the middle of the parlour we occupied, and presently the elderly good wife of our host came in with a huge loaf of bread in her arms, which she deposited in the middle of the bare table, and hurried off (to fetch a tray or dish and a tablecloth, as I innocently supposed); but in a few seconds she returned, carrying an enormous cheese, which promptly descended, with a heavy sound, beside the loaf, also on the bare wood; then I began to understand the style of things a little better, and looked on in no small amusement to see what would follow. Next came a heap of large blue plates (the dear old

inexhaustible "willow pattern"), and on these a fearful mass of gigantic wooden-hafted knives and forks; then a very small tea-tray, with a very large crockery teapot, and a tall shaking tower of capacious blue cups and saucers, skilfully packed together; with some table-spoons of German silver, or some other equally unpleasant composition. A basin of black sugar, and some coarse salt, completed the display, until the entrance of a great dish of hot fried mutton-chops and rashers of salt pork.

Spirits and excellent English bottled ale and porter are kept in the meanest public-houses in the colonies; but of their wine, the white is cape, and the port of that peculiar vintage for which "Punch" gave us the recipe some years ago, prescribing a decoction of logwood, brown paper, and old boots.

Some cases of well-stuffed native birds adorned our parlour, and after tea we had a most unexpected and unlikely treat in such a place, being the company of a very large and excellent musical box, which played some brilliant airs from new operas very pleasingly.

We were dismayed the following morning to find a thick heavy rain falling in a steady determined

way, as if to preclude all chance of our proceeding ; and our host prognosticated " a big flood," which was a remarkably cheering and pleasant augury ! Our breakfast was the tea over again, minus the cheese, and I obtained a few eggs for our own servant to boil for us, frying being the only popular mode of cooking them here.

We had slept very comfortably ourselves, with everything sweet and clean, though bare and rough in the extreme, and the other beds looked equally well ; but when poor George came to me, the odour of the abominable " mutton-bird " pillow on which he had lain was most sickening ; and it is retained so strongly in the hair, that the most elaborate washing, aided by " Macassar " and Eau de Cologne, is all unavailing : time alone will remove it. I believe a little careful preparation renders these offensive feathers quite inodorous, but, being cheap, they are used commonly without. It is impossible to be in the same room with any person, or even any garment, that has passed the night on such a bed, without being most unpleasantly aware of the scent.

As I could not find any books to read, save the " Newgate Calendar," I sat at the window sketching

the bridge, whilst the rain forbade our walking about.

The worst thirty miles of our journey now lay before us—the passage through the forest; and, as it seemed scarcely possible to achieve it in one day, short as they were at that season, we thought of hiring some mattresses and blankets from Deloraine, and sending them to a vacant cottage which we had permission to use, ten miles on the way, that we might rest a night there, and divide the stage; but the account we received of this place, which was in the “care” of an Irish stock-keeper, and the abode of untold legions of all varieties of vermin, put a stop to that plan. The only other house on our way was but four miles beyond Deloraine, but even that distance it was desirable to subtract from our last long stage; and a note to the hospitable owner, requesting the aid of a night’s lodging, speedily brought him in person, as its reply, to escort us back with him at once. Just as we were starting, our groom arrived from Port Sorell, with Mr. Meredith’s saddle-horse, equipped with a side saddle, which enabled me to travel more pleasantly, and also to lighten the car. Four miles of boggy, rocky, slippery, sloppy progress brought us to our

new friend's cottage, where all that the kindest hospitality could suggest was done for our comfort.

Bidding a grateful adieu to our worthy entertainer the next morning, we set forth on our last day's pilgrimage, about eight o'clock, with a slight drizzling rain falling, which happily did not increase, and at intervals wholly ceased, but the day continued damp and gloomy.

We plodded on, through dreary woods and swampy plains, now fording a lagoon, now scrambling over a gully, till a steep channel containing a broad stream of black liquid mud lay before us, bearing the cheerful appellation of "Dead Cow Creek." Setting down the children and the maid, Mr. Meredith drove into it, and our poor leader instantly disappeared, all but his head; but floundering on, he emerged, and the wheeler went in, and finally the car; all clambering safely out again, in process of time, on the opposite bank. The maid crossed over by walking along the rails of an adjoining fence; the children were carried; and I made my way down the bank of the gully, till I found a place narrow enough for my horse to jump across. Then we hastened on again, for many such

obstacles beset us, and our general progress could very rarely exceed a walk.

Suddenly, on passing through a gate near to a lonely stock-hut, we were surrounded by fifteen or twenty great fierce dogs, growling and barking furiously ; but before any worse effect was produced than that of making our valiant little dog, Dick, look as bold and angry as if he seriously contemplated fighting the whole party himself, they were called off by the stock-keepers, who very civilly offered us some refreshment, and were very anxious that I would at least take a "pot o' tea;" but it was too early for luncheon, and I am not sufficiently imbued with the genuine bush predilections to admire the composition usually known here as "tea," among the labouring class.

Soon after passing the hospitable stockmen, we reached the Avenue Plain, which in summer must be a beautiful spot, but was then covered with water, from a few inches to a foot or more deep. Its name tolerably well describes it ; a wide, long, open space, intervening between the belt of fine verdant lightwoods and other trees skirting the river "Rubicon" and the great forest ; so that it is a grassy flat, surrounded by high wood, and in

summer is a valuable grazing ground. We did not pass the Rubicon until some time after, and then crossed only a branch of the classic stream, of very insignificant dimensions.

From the Avenue Plain we turned aside, and at once plunged into the dark forest. Gigantic gum-trees rose on every side, and in every variety that such tall, straight, bare, gaunt things can exhibit; for handsome as *single* gum-trees frequently are, and thick-foliaged and massive in their sombre hues, those which grow clustered in the forests are almost invariably ugly, and these were so close together that it was only possible to see around for a short distance, and so destitute of leaf or branch for a height of fifty or seventy feet, that nothing but timber seemed to shut in the view, except where a stray lightwood or wattle brought the welcome relief of foliage to the drear gray wall of upright trunks. Unhappily, they were not all upright; the fallen ones giving us infinitely more trouble than the serried ranks standing; the car often having to make long détours to get round them, amidst dead wood, holes, bogs, and all imaginable obstacles.

At last, for every mile of our difficult progress through this dismal, dreary, and most monotonous

forest seemed like a dozen leagues at least, we made our mid-day halt for nearly an hour; watered and fed the horses, for whom we had brought some oats from Deloraine, and made a good fire to cook our provisions and make some tea, which, being hot, was more coveted than the ale or wine we had with us. Everything around us was cold, damp, dark, and gloomy. Hideous fungi, of all varieties of shape and colour, clustered beneath the wet half-charred logs, or inside the hollow trees, as if they knew themselves to be unfit to meet the light of day, or even the twilight of the forest, so disgusting were they, in their livid, bloated, venomous-looking swarms.

Our allotted rest was soon over, and we set forth again; on, on went the car, jolting, bumping, and splashing along, over logs, rocks, lagunes, and bogs; whilst, as I followed its erratic course, I often reined up my horse, and waited, almost breathlessly, to watch its passage over some unusually threatening "bad bit of road," but providentially no accident happened.

Occasionally we came to some semblance of a bridge, rarely more than the skeleton, the holes and gaps in which had to be temporarily stopped with leafy boughs of trees and shrubs and bundles of

cut reeds and grass, so that the horses' feet might not slip through in crossing. All these delays hindered us exceedingly, and we found the short winter afternoon advancing fast, whilst we were yet far from our destination. A few plants of the beautiful large crimson epacris began to appear at intervals, and soon became abundant; but before, behind, and on all sides, spread the dreary vast forest, an interminable continuance of the same sombre desolate picture, till I began to doubt if the existence of meadows and open country were not altogether a mere pleasant fiction.

I was riding at some distance from the car, when I heard a scream from the nursemaid, and, on hurrying up, found her in great terror and wonder to know what could have hurt the baby, who was bleeding fast from a wound beneath the chin, evidently the bite of a leech. These creatures are very numerous in such damp cold places as those we were traversing; our dogs were often afterwards seen with several hanging to their legs whilst out hunting; and one had probably been brushed into the car from some of the moist shrubs, and, after satisfying its appetite, had dropped off again, for it could nowhere be found.

“Soon after this little fright, a horseman was seen approaching us, who proved to be a kind friend's servant, coming to meet us and assist us in any way he could; and as he was a clever “bushman,” and a most useful intelligent fellow, we were right glad of his addition to our party.

By the time we arrived in sight of a lonely stock-but, supposed to be six miles from our future residence, the sun set; and as to drive in the dark through the standing forest and over the prostrate one was a sheer impossibility, it had been determined to leave the car here, in the care of our old servant and his gun, until the morning, and make our way on in the dark on horseback. Our new ally, “Sydney Bill,” led the way, and kindly volunteered to take charge of the baby, who had at last wearied of his jolting journey, and for some time had cried piteously; but his new rough-looking nurse held him so tenderly, and the walk of the quiet horse was so much more easy a motion than the unequal one of the car, that the poor weary child went quietly to sleep for the remainder of the journey, and worthy “Bill” won my enduring thankfulness. Mr. Meredith took Georgæ before him, on his fine

tall horse, and rode next in the cavalcade; I followed, and the maid and boy, mounted on the tandem horses, closed the procession. We proceeded in "Indian file," endeavouring to keep on the narrow track of little more than a foot wide, which was all the road our bush-route displayed.

In the forest the usual half twilight is after sunset so rapidly changed to perfect darkness, that my somewhat short-sighted eyes soon lost Mr. Meredith, whose dark horse and dark clothes were undistinguishable to me from the rest of the palpable gloom around; and I several times got off the track until I sent the groom on before me, and as the horse he rode was a light gray, I could then just discern a patch of something less black than the surrounding inky void, moving ahead, which I followed with literally blind confidence. Every now and then my husband's voice reached me, giving some direction or warning; sometimes sounding from below, crying, "Mind this steep gully! When at the bottom, keep to the right for a few paces, then turn to the left, or you will be in the bog!"

A little further on came another mud-hollow, and with it the good advice, not easy to follow in

the dark, "Keep in the middle here!—there are deep holes on both sides!"

Shortly after, a quick, sharp "coo-ee!" and "Stoop your head well—here are some very low branches to go under," and as I could not possibly know the exact whereabouts of these treacherous boughs, I lay almost with my face on the horse's neck, till the next order arrived from head-quarters, with directions for the mastery of some new difficulty.

I soon learned to trust more to the sagacity of my good horse than to my own inferior instinct, and, in some way or another, he scrambled safely through all the gullies, and jumped well over all the innumerable logs; and as I could not see one of them, my ride was altogether a series of surprises and mystifications, which would have been amusing enough, had I felt less weary; but I had been ten hours on horseback, tiresomely creeping at a foot pace, and had become so thoroughly chilled, cramped, and drowsy, as to be scarcely capable of feeling the reins in my hand, and began to fear that I should drop off my horse before we arrived at our destination.

Sometimes, looking straight upwards, I could

catch a passing glimpse of a few bright stars, showing that anywhere but in the horrible forest it was a fair clear night; but whilst we were buried in that waste of wood, groping our way like the explorers of some subterraneous world, we were shut out, or rather shut in, from all cheering skyey influences. I scarcely know anything more thoroughly wearisome, both to mind and body, than a slow progress through these dreary dark forests, with their huge, tall, gaunt, bare, half-dead trees, standing around you in apparently the same hideous skeleton shapes, however far you go; as different from the verdant, leafy, shadowy depths of an English wood as a decaying mis-shapen skeleton is from a perfect human form in vigorous life.

Suddenly, the loud barking of several dogs came most pleasantly upon our éars, and in a few more paces a span of starry sky opened out before us, and the outline of some building was visible.

"Here we are at last!" cried my husband, but it seemed unlikely we should be there long, for half a dozen immense dogs were raging round us, apparently only discussing who should be eaten up first, until their master, our valuable assistant "Bill," called them off, and we reached the garden

gate of our new domicile. The poor children, both fast asleep, were quickly carried in, beside a good fire, and I followed as soon as I could walk, for, on first alighting from my horse, I was too much cramped with cold to stand.

The good bachelor friend from whom Mr. Meredith had rented the cottage (and our friend Bill's estimable master) having kindly left us his furniture until some of our own should arrive, we managed admirably, making children's beds of our cushions, cloaks, &c.; nothing seemed worth thinking a trouble or annoyance, now that our difficult and weary journey was safely over.

CHAPTER X.

General Sketch of "Lath Hall."—Cockatoos.—Poverty at Port Sorell.—Potatoes.—Port Sorell Horse-keeping.—Fences.—Dutch Barns.—Model Stables.—Police Station.—Pleasant Sea View.—"Clarissa."—Cottage Sites.

I WAS somewhat curious, the next morning, to judge for myself of the situation of our new dwelling, after the very unfavourable accounts Mr. Meredith had given me, but I found his descriptions most faithful. The cottage occupied the top of a slight slope, which was so far cleared that the chief of the great trees had been cut down, but not cut up, and the enormous dead trunks, lying over and under and across each other, made a most melancholy foreground to the everlasting forest, which bounded the narrow view on all sides, like a high dense screen. Two avenues, which had been cut through it in front of the house, gave distant peeps of two other cottages on two other slopes, and gum-trees again, behind. No one who has any

règard for health would, I should think, venture to live in the hollows or flats of the forest, which seem the very strongholds of ague, miasma, and all the other pleasant progeny of swampy woods.

From the back of the house, the close dense forest was the only view; so close, that any one looking for sky from the kitchen door must gaze up to the zenith for it! Altogether, as may well be imagined, our new home was not a cheerful one in its external characteristics; and we soon found it to be exceedingly damp throughout, and very cold. The walls were built of upright "slabs," that is to say, of thick pieces of rough split timber, six or seven inches broad, two or three inches thick, and about nine feet high, fastened to logs at the bottom, and wall-plates at the top. These slabs were lathed and thinly plastered within, and lathed, but not plastered, without; whence, as the cottage had no name, I bestowed upon it the sobriquet of "Lath Hall." The slabs were in many places some inches apart, and the inside plaster displayed multitudes of capacious crevices, which enabled the external air to keep up a friendly and frequent communication with that within. Five doors and a French window, all opening into our only parlour,

were not calculated to diminish the airiness of the apartment.

By suspending a thick curtain across one recess, we screened off three doors at once; and another curtain hung over another door, excluded a copious volume of wind from an opposite corner.

Fortunately, fire-wood was abundant, and our liberal use of it in every room which possessed a hearth contributed not a little to clear the near portions of the forest of masses of dead wood.

The instalment of our household goods which had been sent overland to Launceston safely reached us in about a fortnight after our own arrival, and the main body in some weeks afterwards, but in a most deplorable condition—broken, dismembered, and destroyed; casks of well-packed china and glass produced little besides fragments, and all the furniture was maimed, wounded, and disfigured for life. We found, on inquiry, that when the goods were put on board the vessel engaged to convey them from Swan Port to Launceston, her captain and crew were all alike intoxicated, and tumbled our unlucky goods pell-mell into the vessel's hold; and hence the serious and very annoying loss we suffered.

"Lath Hall" being about five miles inland from the police office and township on the shore of Port Sorell, I took an early opportunity of accompanying Mr. Meredith in one of his daily rides thither, to see what manner of place the coast of our new district might be, for I certainly was not enamoured of the inland portion I had seen. Our way lay through the forest, dark, dismal, and dreary as ever, for about three miles; the only variety of scene was afforded by a few wretched-looking huts and hovels, the dwellings of "cockatooers," who are not, as it might seem, a species of bird, but human beings; who rent portions of this forest from the proprietors or their mortgagees, on exorbitant terms, and vainly endeavour to exist on what they can earn besides, their frequent compulsory abstinence from meat, when they cannot afford to buy it, even in this land of cheap and abundant food, giving them some affinity to the grain-eating white cockatoos.

The mere clearing off the timber from such land usually costs at least 10*l.* an acre, and the impracticability of a man without capital clearing it, paying rent for it all the while, and maintaining himself and family till the crop comes in, is too evident to any rational mind to need a comment.

The common course is this:—Some industrious servant who has saved a few pounds from his wages, if he has been so unusually fortunate in this peculiar district as to receive his earnings, or a man with a little money and farm stock, blindly agrees to pay a high annual rent for a piece of dense forest, covered with the heaviest timber, the land itself being of the richest description. With a large portion of his small capital, he builds a hut for his family, and then goes on clearing a field for the plough. Meantime, nothing is coming in, and money for food constantly going out; rent-day comes round, and if the remaining savings are enough, they pay the rent; if not, the cart, plough, or bullocks must go as well. The coming crop is offered as security for other inevitable debts, and is swept off when harvested, leaving only the promise of the next to carry on the work with until it comes; and when it does, in all probability the demands exceed the receipts; the sad finale being that the wretched family goes forth again, bereft of every shilling they possessed, and the place where their all lies buried is let as an “improved property” to some other adventurer at an advanced rental. Until I came into the district of Port

Sorell, I could not conceive such poverty as I saw there, to be possible in this land of plenteousness; nor is there, I imagine, in the whole island a similarly-conditioned neighbourhood. It was something quite new again to me, to find the poor people around us thankful for any victuals or other little helps we could give them, such as our comfortable small settlers of Swan Port would have scorned to accept had they been offered. One poor industrious man near us declared afterwards that the scraps of meat and rusty bacon, &c., he had from our kitchen were all he had to eat during one winter, except some cabbages from his garden; every saleable kind of produce, such as wheat, potatoes, &c., having gone in part payment of his debts and rent.

As compared with the extremities of famine recently suffered by thousands of our miserable fellow-creatures in Ireland and England, a winter's subsistence on cabbages may not appear to merit much commiseration; but here, where good fresh meat sells for twopence or twopence-halfpenny a pound, and is used thrice a day in every labourer's or shepherd's hut, besides tea and sugar, and abundance of good wheaten bread, vegetable diet is felt as an unusual hardship.

Much of the penury of Port Sorell may be traced to the high price which was obtained for potatoes some few years ago. Those persons who cultivated them in this district sold their crops one year for 10*l.* and 12*l.* per ton, and as the produce varies from six to ten tons an acre, according to soil and aspect, the simple people fancied they had nothing further to do but plant and dig potatoes, and count gold, (if indeed such gains as they expected *could* be counted!) not taking into consideration the possibility of a depreciation of prices. Lavish expenditure in clearing, cultivating, and building was rapidly made; little estates were mortgaged beyond their value, for funds to carry on the improvements; and, after the whole small population of the neighbourhood had become deeply involved in the fatal potato speculation, prices sank, more rapidly even than they had risen, and, instead of 12*l.*, the faithless root fetched only 5*s.* or 10*s.* the ton. At the period of our residence at Lath Hall, they were deemed scarcely worth even carriage. Horses and pigs were fed on them, and some scores of cart-loads, stored in an inclosure on one side of the cottage we occupied, were deemed worthless, and left there to

perish, until the insufferable odour arising from their putrescence compelled us to require their removal.

On Mr. Meredith's first arrival in the district, he one day called at the cottage of a settler, who very civilly inquired, "Would you like your horse put in the stable, Mr. Meredith?"

"No, I thank you," was the reply, "he will do quite well where I left him."

"Then," rejoined Mr. Smith, "shall I send him a few potatoes?"

Such an extraordinary suggestion as offering a dish of potatoes to a horse seemed very like a quiz; but the grave earnestness of the querist proved his perfect sincerity, and, on inquiry, Mr. Meredith was duly initiated into the Port Sorell style of horse-keeping; a bucket of small raw washed potatoes being as usual a "feed" there, as a "quartern of oats" at Home, and the animals seem to relish and thrive on them.

And now to return to our cockatooers' farms, from which the great potato question has too long detained me. Four or five of these little excavations in the forest lay near our route to the beach; each with its one or two small patches of cultiva-

tion, surrounded by the forest wall (like a child's garden of a foot square, with a paling a yard high), and a low dilapidated hut and some hovels, usually crouching in one corner of the clearing, shadowed from all but a vertical sun by the gigantic tree-barrier around.

In a place where timber of the best descriptions for sawing or splitting is so superabundant as it is here, we should expect to see particularly good fences, as, if the labour of making posts and rails were too expensive, a perfect rampart of a dead-wood fence might be effected with ease, and the advantage of saving labour in clearing the ground: but the common fences all through Port Sorell would convey the idea that timber was an almost unattainable article; for, save in one or two instances, I rarely saw any but the most deplorable imitations of brush fences ever attempted, and as these are no defence against the inroads of cattle on the growing corn, perpetual disputes and bickerings arise, which a little good fencing would wholly prevent. Undoubtedly, uncertain tenure and small gains tend not a little to such negligence in tenants, but the proprietors are scarcely better farmers themselves.

At one time I engaged a "cockatooer's" wife in the neighbourhood to come to our house two days in the week, to wash and iron, and gave her 5s. each time and her board; but she shortly sent me word she could not come again, as she must stop at home to keep the cattle off the wheat. A day or two after, I had the curiosity to go and look at the fence of their field. It consisted of a few boughs of shrubs laid on the ground, varying from a few inches to two feet in height, and at intervals forked sticks were stuck up with long thin "tea-tree" poles, like fishing-rods, resting in the forks, and these by no means continuous. It would not have kept a sheep out, in any one place, far less resist the determination and strength of half-wild cattle. Yet these people were content to plough and sow, and then leave their crop with no defence but the vigilance of an old woman; whilst a couple of men and a team of oxen would in less than a week put such a wall of logs round it as should be impregnable for years, and had this been done, I need not have lost my washerwoman, nor she her wages.

The majority of the barns in the district exhibit an equal economy of timber and industry. The

most popular are denominated Dutch barns, and consist of a roof, supported on posts, with the sides and ends open. I have also seen stables there, constructed in the same style, but with the spaces between the posts walled up with heaps of manure two or three feet thick! The least tidy kind of rough wall I have observed in any other part of the colony has been "wattle and dab," or turf at the least; it remained for the ingenious indolence of Port Sorell to invent this odoriferous composite order of rural architecture.

Some few bits of the forest scenery on our way to the beach were, from being less dense, much more pleasing than the rest, especially where magnificent lightwoods, rich in colour and foliage, and the symmetrical native cherry trees (*Exocarpus*), in their close massive cypress-like shape, and full deep-shaded green hue, made pleasant pictures amongst the more dreary realities of the eternal *Eucalyptus* trunks above, and the harsh olive green ferns below. A few flowers appeared here and there, seeming rather like things gone astray from a fairer home; than constant dwellers beneath the dark gum-tree trunks.

After passing one or two swampy plains tole-

rably bare of trees—crossing “Muddy Creek,” a clear fresh-water rivulet in a deep hollow—and descending the next hill, a most welcome line of blue water appeared over the distant trees, and we entered a more open country of undulating grass land, with belts and groups of leafy trees scattered about, more like a Swan Port sheep-run, than the Port Sorell forest; and soon we reached the police station, the situation of which seemed to me singularly beautiful, after our forest-den, commanding a view of the calm blue waters of the port, its pretty rocky islets, and long wooded points, with the open sea (Bass’s Straits) beyond, bounded on the east by the beautiful range of the Asbestus Mountains, and on the west by the West Head of Port Sorell, and Carbuncle Island (usually rendered Cary-buncle). Two or three little vessels, including my odoriferous friends of the Launceston wharf, lay at anchor in the port. The name of one of these was for some time a problem to us: first we heard of a package come for us by the “Clara Say;” then the name changed to the “Clara Say oh!” and then into the “Claret Sea,” which in due time was absorbed in the “Pharisee,” an odd name for an honest little schooner,

we thought, until a sight of her stern-board announced to us that she bore, in reality, the soft and romantic appellation of "Clarissa!" Nor is Port Sorell alone ingenious in such distortions: I have known the "Sesostris" spoken of as the "Sea Ostrich;" the "Vansittart" transformed to the "Fancy Tart;" and a man in New Zealand being ordered to name a vessel the "Crocodile," actually painted, launched, and registered her as the "Crooked Eye!"

A boat, pulling swiftly out to one of the vessels, and numerous flocks of gulls and red-bills busily flying to and fro, or fishing in the shallows, added just enough of life and motion to the calm glorious view and the bright clear sunshine, which in itself was reviving and comforting, after the watery vapoury kind of twinkle which reached our forest gloom. I sunned myself delightfully on the sandy beach, till Mr. Meredith's business was over, and then we visited three different spots, which he had thought of as pleasant sites for our own cottage. The first was a natural terrace, with a conical hill behind, commanding at high water a fine view of the port, and with good fresh water in the vicinity; but at low tide, the view chiefly consisted of reedy mud-

flats and sand-banks, which was not pleasant. The second spot was most beautiful; a rocky but well-sheltered and woody point, with a view both of the port and its islands, and the open sea; with the Asbestus Mountains opposite; everything in point of beauty, but deficient in the requisite of fresh water,—

“ Water, water, everywhere,
But not a drop to drink.”

And our miserable experience of drought in New South Wales made us especially covetous of an abundant supply. Reluctantly, we rode away to the third selected point. This was a prominent corner of a natural terrace, which we had traced along for some distance, close to a running stream of good water, and with as lovely a view as from the spot we had last left, although as yet only seen by glimpses through the great trees; but we fully appreciated the capabilities of the place, and decided that there we would erect our cottage, as soon as the land could be officially surveyed for the Government, the allotments advertised in the Government Gazette, and purchased at the public sale, all which involved an inevitable delay of some months.

•
Wooden houses are built with such rapidity that we hoped to remove into ours within a year, including all expected hindrances; but even that seemed a long time to live so completely "under the shade of melancholy boughs."

CHAPTER XI.

Our New Neighbours.—Golden Rule for Ladies.—Touchstone and Audrey.—Veterinary Conversation.—Excursions.—Walk to the “Sisters.”—Sea-Birds.—Pelicans and Porpoises, &c.

THE inhabitants of our new district were highly delighted at having their frequent prayers for a resident police magistrate at length granted, and the full measure of popularity was accorded to him; whilst I was enabled to judge of the degree of reflected lustre which I enjoyed, by the number of calls which succeeded my arrival: by the time these complimentary visits were over, and in due order returned, I had grown quite weary of answering the same questions over and over again. I soon discovered that, although we had a more numerous list of *visitors* than at Swan Port, we had not gained in point of *society*.

All the residents were farmers, of greater or less

degree, and all "esquires," if not in their own right, by their own assertion, which was often very amusing, and, for all common purposes, did as well. In America, military titles seem the especial ambition of the shop-keeping and agricultural classes, and "majors," "colonels," and "generals" abound on all sides; but in our peaceful island, all such redundant ambition tends towards one point of glory, and "esquire" is the coveted and demanded distinction, *asked for*, when not accorded without, and now so universally applied, that its omission will soon begin to be the really honourable distinction of a colonial gentleman.

One crying fault of the "ladies" prevails far more in colonial than in English society—I allude to that most absurd fallacy, which seems to imagine that a lady ought to be discovered by any chance visitor, at any hour of the day, fully arrayed in her newest attire, and in a state of smartness and precision as regards flounces, ribbons, and collars, which is wholly and utterly incompatible with any kind of domestic occupation or duty whatsoever.

Now the prevalence of this monstrous belief is productive of many evils; not the least of which is, the delay which almost invariably takes place in the

appearance of the ladies of any family on whom one calls in the country; and the period allotted for a friendly chat thus passes in a dreary survey of a formal drawing-room, or in constrained talk with the unhappy master of the house, who is in a fidget of anxiety and impatience at the absence of wife and daughters. Thus, unless we determine to let our own dinner spoil, or to omit some other intended visit, we are compelled to take leave in five minutes after the entrance of our fair friends, whose recently-smoothed hair, horizontally-folded dresses, and red damp hands, attest with painful certainty the trouble which our kindly-intended call has occasioned them.

I know I am on dangerous ground, and that I might almost as safely "patter in a hornet's nest," as show myself so manifestly a traitor in the camp; yet a little exposure of such follies oftentimes effects so much improvement, that I do not hesitate to take my share of responsibility in the attempt. The golden rule by which all such troublesome transformations may be rendered unnecessary is, of course, to avoid ever being untidy or slatternly, let our occupation be what it may.

My own criterion of propriety in every-day dress is a very simple one. Of all persons living, I

consider my husband to merit my first and chiefest respect; and if my attire is such as I deem neat and proper to be worn in *his* presence, I do not think I ought to suppose it unfit to appear in before indifferent people or strangers. And it seems to me far more pleasant to imagine one's lady-friends notably busy in a morning, as good country housewives must be and are, than to conceive such useless impossibilities as ladies (some of whom in this place, I know, keep no female servant) dressed in new silks or muslins at noon, and seated on a sofa, doing nothing! To my simple notions, the latter is intensely contemptible, whilst the former is right and respectable; and whatever may be thought of my heretical opinion by my fair acquaintances themselves, I am quite sure that the husbands, fathers, and brothers, are all on my side of the question.

The children, too! such an expenditure of soap and hair-oil as is deemed indispensable before they can be introduced to strangers! and then ten to one but the poor innocents put their mamma in an agony by instantly informing you that "This is my best frock!" or that "Bobby mustn't come in, he's dirty!" Whereas, if no attempt were made to

make things appear finer than they really are, all this vexation would be spared, and the pleasant little dirt-pie or pebble-pudding which the little party were happily discussing, would proceed without interruption.

One of our neighbouring "esquires" one day asked Mr. Meredith what he called the horse he was then riding; he replied, "Oh, this is Touchstone, and that," pointing to mine, "is Audrey."

"Ah!" rejoined the querist thoughtfully—"Yes, I see; Touch-stone—oh, yes, he *does* touch the stones, to be sure, but still I think Top-log would have been better, for he's a rare one to leap!"

Our unlucky *penchant* for classical or Shakespearian names for favourite horses or dogs, often led to a similar display of incorrigible innocence in our acquaintance, very few of our Port Sorell friends being literary characters. A lady, whilst looking over a scrap-book, with which I had essayed to amuse her during part of a dreary visit, appealed to me for some explanation of one of Liversedge's exquisite Shakespeare scenes which passed her comprehension, and I began trying to *remind* her of the situation it represented, by a rough sketch of the well-known characters and locality of the play; but

she wofully checked my valuable illustrations by exclaiming, "Oh, no, indeed, I don't remember anything about it; I never read Shakespeare, I never could."

Shortly afterwards, some local matter became the topic of conversation, and, thinking that was perhaps a more congenial theme, I addressed a common-place remark to my fair guest as to her opinion of the affair; but was again repulsed and reproved by "I do n't know, indeed, I never trouble *my* head with reading newspapers; I've something else to do." The very truth being, as I opine, that such heads pass through life in the enjoyment of almost absolute sinecures.

I was sometimes rather startled by the very *veterinary* character of the conversation prevalent among some few young and (otherwise) lady-like women of our acquaintance. Good and fearless horse-women themselves, their whole delight seemed to be in the discussion of matters pertaining to the stable; and when meeting any young lady friend from a distance, the first questions were not enquiries after parents, sisters, brothers, or friends: no, nor even the lady-beloved talk of weddings and dress; but the discourse almost invariably took a

"turfy" turn, that was, to say the least, unfeminine in the extreme.

As the swampy road between "Lath Hall" and the port became tolerably hard in summer, we frequently drove down with the children, to pass the day on the sea beach, both as a great treat and a sanitary measure also; for we felt how impossible it must be to live long in that dark dank place, surrounded with such masses of growing and decaying vegetable matter, without the children, at least, feeling the injurious effects. The perceptible change in the atmosphere as we left the forest was always striking. On a cool day, the air around our cottage was damp and chilly, on a warm one, close and oppressive, and always seemed heavy, as if vapour-laden; but as soon as we emerged from the woods upon the open land, the fresh light sea-breeze brought us new life and vigour; the very act of breathing was a pleasant sensation, and we all heartily enjoyed our little excursions.

One day we had established the children and the maid in a nice rocky nook under some lovely box-trees (a species of our tribe of myrtles), where George could either pick shells or pull flowers, or, what children still more delight in, scoop up

“mountains” of sand on the broad smooth beach ; and as the water was at its lowest ebb, Mr. Meredith and I determined to walk across to one of the islands called the “Sisters,” which we had often wistfully gazed at from the shore.

The lovely beach we mostly frequented formed at high water the margin of a bright bay, nestled amidst rocks and wooded banks ; but the tide receded so far that, at low water, an expanse of hard sand, nearly half a mile broad, was left bare and dry, and apparently extended to the islands, whither we boldly directed our course ; but, as we approached, a broad deep channel became visible, lying between us and our goal. Skirting it round for some distance, we found a shallow place, scarcely ankle deep, and, resolving not to be so lightly foiled in our purpose, began to step across it, when we found ourselves on a quicksand, and had to be tolerably active to get safe through. Once on the island, objects of interest abounded. Sea-birds in flocks were around us ; gray and white gulls uttering their plaintive cry overhead, as they floated along, with one bright eye bent upon us ; busy merry red-bills, circling us round and round, repeating their sharp impatient notes ; swift-footed little sand-larks

skimming rapidly over the beach, like gray and white balls, whirled along in succession; and grand demure ponderous pelicans, in their silvery white and raven gray plumage, sitting asleep, or standing like statues on the broad smooth sands. Silently and stealthily we stepped nearer and nearer to see them better; but our curiosity—as curiosity so often does—defeated its own object, and aroused the pelicans to a full belief of their peril in allowing us to advance so far. Their process of taking flight was to me exceedingly droll; they began by making a short jump on both feet, then another, and another, and another, each jump becoming longer and higher, and their wings becoming gradually expanded, till they finally bounded up from the ground and soared away; and to see eight or ten of these immense birds hopping along in this measured and deliberate style, with their grave and imposing aspect and long pouched bills, was the most comic piece of solemnity I ever witnessed.

After the pelicans took flight, a shoal of porpoises came floundering by, plunging and splashing most delightfully; then we went prying amongst the crevices of the rocks, and in the clear pools, gazing at the myriads of beautiful starfish and *Echini*, and

heedlessly scrambling over the sea-weedy crags in search of oysters, until a chance look towards the shore showed us the returning tide flowing rapidly in, and our retreat almost cut off; but by instantly decamping, and fording our quicksand channel, then considerably above a foot deep, we escaped all harm save a good wetting, and by the time we had walked to the car, and were ready to drive home, my somewhat mermaidish garments had become nearly dry in the sun and wind.

CHAPTER XII.

Expedition to an Enchanted Valley.—Lichens.—N Nettles.—Fern-trees.
—Small Ferns.—Natural Temple.—The Tallow-tree.—Sassafras.
—Mischances by the Way.—Clematis.—Orchidaceous Flowers.—
Native Laburnum.

MR. MEREDITH used often to make long explorations in the neighbourhood of our cottage, sometimes to shoot ducks or a kangaroo, and as frequently merely for a new walk. One day he returned with such an armful of beautiful shrubs and ferns, and such exciting accounts of the singularly beautiful spots where he found them, that I waited impatiently for his first leisure day, that I might go with him into the new and wondrous world he had discovered, and see its treasures growing there.

Accordingly on the first opportunity we set forth; we rode on horseback for two miles of forest, and then arriving at a "scrub," so thick and close that our horses could go no further, we left them with

the servant, and proceeded on foot. We soon struck into a cattle path, which was a beaten though very narrow track underfoot, and so far a passage above, that the shrubs gave way on being pushed, but instantly closed again. Long pendulous streamers of tangled gray lichen hung like enormous beards from the trees, and on horizontal branches formed perfect curtains of some feet in depth. Funguses of all kinds protruded from the dead, damp, mossy logs and gigantic fallen trees that lay in our path, and the deep soft beds of accumulated decaying leaves and bark that one's feet sank into were damp and spongy, and chill, even on a warm summer day.

The nettles of this colony are the most formidable I have ever encountered, both in size and venom, and in this primeval scrub they flourished in undisturbed luxuriance, often rising far above our heads, and forming quite a tree-like growth, armed with a fierce array of poisoned spears, with which they ruthlessly attacked my arms and ankles; a thin print dress being a poor defence against their sharp and most painful stings, from which I suffered severely for some days after this scramble.

A friend of ours once rode after some cattle into

a mass of these nettles, which spread over a large space of ground. His horse became so infuriated by the pain of the nettle-stings, that he threw himself down amongst them to roll, which of course increased the poor animal's torture, and his master could neither lead nor drive him out; the creature was rendered mad and furious by pain, and in a short time died in convulsions.

Our cattle-track at length brought us into the enchanted valley Mr. Meredith had discovered, and not in my most fantastic imaginings had I ever pictured to myself anything so exquisitely beautiful! We were in a world of fern-trees, some palm-like and of gigantic size, others quite juvenile; some tall and erect as the columns of a temple, others bending into an arch, or springing up in diverging groups, leaning in all directions; their wide-spreading feathery crowns forming half-transparent green canopies, that folded and waved together in many places so closely that only a span of blue sky could peep down between them, to glitter on the bright sparkling rivulet that tumbled and foamed along over mossy rocks, and under fantastic natural log bridges, and down into dark mysterious channels that no eye could trace out, under those masses of

fern trunks, and broad green feathers overarch-
ing it; and all around, far above the tallest ferns,
huge forest trees soared up aloft, throwing their
great arms about in a gale that was blowing up
there, whilst scarcely a breath lifted the lightest
feather of the ferns below; all was calm and silent
beside us, save the pleasant music of the rivulet,
and the tiny chirping of some bright little birds,
flitting about amongst the underwood.

I had brought my sketch-book, and although
despairing of success, sat down under a fern-canopy
to attempt an outline of some of the whimsical
groups before me, whilst Mr. Meredith and Dick
went to look for a kangaroo, the former giving me
the needless caution not to wander about, lest I
should be lost, a catastrophe for which I seem to
possess a natural aptitude in the "Bush."

I soon relinquished my pencil, and shut my
book, half in disgust at my own presumption in
attempting for an instant a subject so far beyond
my poor abilities; and, fastening my handkerchief
to the trunk of my canopy fern-tree, I ventured to
make short excursions from it on all sides, taking
care not to go out of sight of the handkerchief.
• Sometimes I could go as much as ten yards, but

this was in the clearest place; generally the view closed in about five or six.

The stems of the fern-trees here varied from six to twenty or thirty feet high, and from eight inches diameter to two or three feet; their external substance being a dark-coloured, thick, soft, fibrous, mat-like bark, frequently netted over with the most delicate little ferns, growing on it parasitically. One species of these creeping ferns had long winding stems, so tough and strong that I could rarely break them, and waving polished leaves, not unlike hart's-tongue, but narrower. These wreathed round and round the mossy columns of the fern-trees like living garlands, and the wondrously-elegant stately crown-canopy of feathers (from twelve to eighteen feet long) springing from the summit, bent over in a graceful curve all around, as evenly and regularly as the ribs of a parasol.

Whilst making one of my cautious six-yard tours, a fine brush kangaroo came by me, and was instantly out of sight again; and then I heard a whistle, which I answered by a "*coo-ee*," and Dick soon bounded to me, followed by his master. We then shared our sandwiches with the

little birds and the ants, and drank of the bright cool rivulet, and again went on exploring. In one place we found a perfect living model of an ancient vaulted crypt, such as I have seen in old churches or castles, or beneath St. Mary's Hall in Coventry. We stood in a large level space, devoid of grass or any kind of undergrowth, but strewn with fern leaflets like a thick, soft, even mat. Hundreds—perhaps thousands—of fern-trees grew here, of nearly uniform size, and at equal distances, all straight and erect as chiselled pillars, and, springing from their living capitals, the long, arching, thick-ribbed fern-leaves spread forth and mingled densely overhead in a groined roof of the daintiest beauty, through which not a ray of light gleamed down, the solemn twilight of the place strangely suiting with its almost sacred character. Openings between the outer columns seemed like arched doors and windows seen through the “long-drawn aisle,” and stray gleams of sunshine falling across them were faintly reflected on the fretted vault above us.

Danby *might* paint the scene; or perhaps one of Cattermole's wondrous water-colour pictures done on the spot might convey some tolerable idea of

its form and colouring, but a mere slight sketch were wholly useless.

After reluctantly leaving our temple in the wilderness, we wandered some time longer amidst the grand and beautiful scenes around, and I made a collection of small ferns and other plants new to me.

We noticed one very orniamental shrub, usually known as the "Tallow-tree" (from the viscous greasy pulp of the berries), growing here very abundantly, and in great luxuriance; but every one we found was growing out of a fern-tree, the foster-parent in most cases appearing exhausted and withering, whilst the nursling throve most vigorously. It seemed, generally, as if a seed had lodged in the soft fibrous rind of the fern-tree, and had sprung up into a tall, strong, erect stem, at the same time sending out downward shoots, that eventually struck into the earth; but we could not find one plant growing in and out of the earth, although I am aware that the tree is not always a parasite. Many of the stems were a foot through, and their great, coiling, snaky root-shoots clasped about the poor old hoary fern-trees. These tyrant parasites are very handsome,

with rich, dark green, glossy leaves, and red blossoms, succeeded by most brilliant orange-coloured berries, which, when ripe, split open, and the case flying back partially displays the bright red cluster of seeds within, like a little pomegranate with an orange-peel husk.

The beautiful Tasmanian sassafras-tree is also a dweller in some parts of our fern-tree valley, but not in those we explored on the present occasion. The flowers are white and fragrant, the leaves large and bright green, and the bark has a most aromatic scent, besides being, in a decoction, an excellent tonic medicine. The wood is hard and white, with scarcely any visible grain, but is marked or shaded with light brown in irregular occasional streaks. Thinking that it must partake the pleasant fragrance of its bark, I procured some to make boxes of, but found it quite devoid of scent after the bark was removed. A block of it furnished Mr. Meredith with an excellent material for a beautiful toy sailing-boat, which he carved out of it for George; and the fine, close, velvety texture of the wood seems admirably adapted for carving of any kind. The sawyers and other bush-men familiar with the tree call it

indiscriminately "saucifax," "sarserfrax," and "satisfaction."

We found no small difficulty in getting out of our vale of enchantment; indeed, I began to think that, having really forced an entrance into Fairy Land, the wicked sprites had bewitched us, so that we must perforce remain there. No returning cattle-track could be discovered, the scrub was too dense to observe the position of the sun, and its unbroken entanglement was most fatiguing to force one's way through. Several times we took a wrong direction, and, after a long combat with briars and nettles, were forced to "try back" again. The heat and oven-like closeness of the air were most depressing to strength and spirits, and once or twice I sank down almost exhausted; but after a brief rest I grew more resolute, and pushed on after my husband.

The impossibility of seeing what was beneath our feet caused me to suffer many unwelcome surprises, by stumbling over logs, falling into holes, and like mischances; but at length we succeeded in scrambling once again into light and sunshine, and very thankfully mounted our horses and rode home, the pleasure of our day's exploring having so im-

measurably overbalanced the fatigue, that I promised myself several more pilgrimages to the same shrine, which, alas, were never performed.

I never saw the lovely native clematis growing so luxuriantly as among the Port Sorell forests. There, over the universal undergrowth of ferns, this beautiful climber often spread over a space many feet broad and long, in a richly-woven mantle of leaf and flower, or, clinging to some slender tree, formed a tangled covering all over it, with long starry chaplets waving about. The bright blue *Comesperma* was equally abundant, but its abode was usually in drier and more open places.

Myriads of strangely-shaped orchidaceous flowers bloomed in all situations, and included various species of yellow and brown *Diuris*, lilac, pink, and blue kaladenias, various in form as in colour; and one very eccentric individual of the orchis family, with a very long dark-brown lower lip, in the centre of which rose a large protuberance like a nose. I have shown my drawing of it to many persons, but none had ever seen the plant, or could tell me its name. I also found three varieties of a singular green orchis, of a helmet-shape, growing

singly, on rather tall slender footstalks. One of these had a long feather-like appendage protruding from the opening in front.

A beautiful shrub, with flowers and leaves very much resembling the laburnum, formed thickets in some of the damp hollows near us, and many other ornamental shrubs abounded, whilst fern-trees were plentiful near most of the rivulets; but though very Oriental and palm-like in their aspect, they were not comparable, in point of beauty or magnitude, with those of our charmed dell.

CHAPTER XIII.

Tasmanian Eagle.—White Hawk.—White Cockatoos.—Superb Warblers' Nest.—Strange Insect.—Venomous Guests.—Burning Trees.—Stinging Ants.—Flies.—Wood-Tick.

FEW varieties of birds enlivened our forest gloom ; the most numerous were the crows and black magpies ; but none of the sweetly-singing pied magpies are seen nearer Port Sorell than the Avenue Plain ; and much as I missed my pleasant merry friends, I could not but applaud their taste in frequenting any part of the island rather than this most dreary and disagreeable district.

Now and then, two, three, or four lordly eagles might be seen soaring grandly high overhead at the same time, and once we saw as many as seven together, and marvelled much what so grave an augury portended. As all things edible were scarce in the vicinity, we sometimes thought that our goats, with their young kids, might possibly attract the

attention of the eagles; but I must freely exonerate them from all charge of theft—they never molested any of our live stock. I cannot give an equally good character to their disreputable kinsfolk, the hawks, who were bolder and more rapacious than any I had seen before, coming and sitting quite composedly on the very hen-house itself, and swooping into the veranda after my pet guinea-fowls with insufferable audacity. White hawks, so rare in most parts of the island, were numerous here; they are most superb birds, with plumage soft as satin, and whiter even than snow; and radiant piercing eyes, so bold and bright! I often wished to procure a young one to rear tame, but I suppose that a revolt amongst my poultry would certainly have ensued, on the installation of such a favourite.

The Tasmanian eagle is a very large and noble bird, of grand and majestic aspect; but prejudice is here very strong against him, and scores of instances are currently related of his destructive predilections for young lambs, sucking pigs, and other dainty morsels; we, however, give very little credence to these ungenerous stories, as none of the narrators have been able to say that they themselves saw the offence committed.

One of our shepherds (at Swan Port), having on one occasion wounded an eagle slightly in the wing, caught it, and brought it to me: had I refused to keep the poor thing, it would immediately have been put to death; I therefore let him leave it, and for some days it was tethered by the leg to a large coop, and plenty of food given to it, but it ate nothing—parrots, chickens, rabbits, and offal were all alike untouched. I then supposed that my noble captive was too heroic to eat whilst in that fettered condition, and after having the feathers of one long beautiful wing cut, I set him at liberty in the garden; but, although daily tempted by fresh food, he ate nothing for *three weeks* from the time of his capture, and I began to despair of keeping him alive, when one day, to my great joy, a piece of fresh liver conquered his heroism, and he devoured it greedily. After that he always fed heartily, and roamed about the garden for some months, but never became tame enough to eat from our hands. One day a servant whom I had entrusted with a gun to shoot rabbits, saw my poor eagle sitting on a fence a short distance from the house, and believing it to be a wild one, shot it, much to my vexation.

The beak and talons, and indeed the whole form and aspect of the bird, denote enormous strength, and the span of the extended wings is from seven to nine feet, so that it would be a formidable adversary to almost any creature it determined to attack. I have heard a story here of a child two years old being carried some distance by an eagle, and then dropped, with its head severely injured; but I am unwilling to place any reliance on the tale.

The two neighbouring dwellings which we used to peep at through the streets or avenues cut in our girdle of forest, had some meadows and corn-fields on a rich marsh that spread out below them, and in our walks we often saw great flocks of white cockatoos thickly scattered about like sheep, eating up the springing grain. Unlike the clever, harmless, black cockatoos, the white ones are exceedingly mischievous, devouring immense quantities of corn; and they are so cunning and sagacious, that it is very difficult to approach them with a gun. One pair which had been shot near us was brought me as a present. They were very large handsome birds, of snow-white plumage, with crests and lower tail-feathers of the most pure and delicate yellow. Knowing that they feed wholly on grain, and are

commonly eaten in New South Wales, I had them roasted, and we found them excellent, being young and tender, very much like a fat wild duck; but I believe youth is an indispensable requisite in a cooked cockatoo, the elderly birds being of rather leathery texture.

Very few parrots visited us, and those were of the common green kind, the least beautiful of all. Wild ducks and quail were tolerably plentiful, but we neither saw bronze-winged pigeons nor wattle-birds.

One or two pairs of "Superb Warblers" lived close to the garden fence, and for a long time I tried in vain to discover their nest. We often fed them, and they came boldly about us, but always baffled me when I endeavoured to watch them home. At last I felt quite sure I had found the grass tussock containing one nest, but although this was not above two feet across, I was some time still ere I discovered the entrance, for of course I would not disturb anything, and the little creatures were so artful and cautious, and in such a sad state of fluttering chirping trepidation when I was peeping about, that they distracted my attention, as they naturally intended to do. At last, I accidentally

looked directly into the little tube of woven grass and web that served them as hall and ante-room—several blades of reeds waved before it, but still, on gazing intently down into the dark little cavity, I espied two or three little gaping mouths, and heard a faint small chirp. The two tiny parents of these tinier babies (which could not be much bigger than peas) were all the time flying round and round me, in most distressing terror, almost brushing my face with their delicate wings in their anxiety to drive me away; and the instant I drew back, both darted into the nest to see if all was right at home. Poor little flutterers! they need not have feared me. I only confided the secret of their abode to my husband, and so fearful was he of disturbing them, that I could not induce him to go near enough to examine the nest. In due time we had the pleasure of seeing the whole miniature family out together; the old birds in a great state of importance and flutter, feeding their droll brown little offspring most assiduously.

“Come here, and look at a strange insect,” said Mr. Meredith, one day when we were in the garden; and I went, and looked, and looked again, all over the low young cherry-tree to which he pointed.

"I cannot see any insect; where is it?"

"Oh! look for it; it is at least eight inches long, so you surely ought to find it!"

And searching again, more narrowly than before, and following the direction of his glance, I observed something like a few dry sticks or twigs, hanging in a loose irregular angular style from one of the sprays, which, on a closer view, proved to be a living creature, so exactly the colour and apparent texture of a dead stick, that I could scarcely credit its being anything else, and carefully took it off the tree, before being quite convinced. I suppose—for I am wofully unlearned in entomology—that it was one of the animated straw genus. The body was of a dull brown, and about six inches long, and little more than a quarter of an inch thick, with one or two folds just like the joints of a dead reed or twig; the head had prominent eyes, and two long feelers, like thin dead rushes, which being in a line with the body, added nearly three inches to its apparent length. The six legs were like thin dead rushes too, about four inches long, divided into three joints and ending in a clawed foot. Rather nearer to the head than the tail were two very short small wings, like the bladebones of unfinished

shoulders, evidently quite inefficient as instruments of flight to the long body and legs. The creature seemed in a half-torpid state when I captured it, and eventually became rigid, when I ventured to believe it really dead, and preserved it, until devoured by insects, and utterly destroyed. Some persons who saw it told me they had seen other specimens, with large handsome wings; but their kind promises to procure me one were never fulfilled.

Any one fond of entomology, or the study of the Crustacea, might have enjoyed great opportunities and facilities at "Lath Hall," where fine lively scorpions were in the frequent practice of perambulating our parlour walls, particularly near the fireplace; and interesting full-grown centipedes, of a most venomous green hue, and rarely less than four inches in length, gracefully meandered in the folds of the window-curtains, our dressing-room (usually by us denominated "the tank," from its icy dampness) being their favourite haunt; and as in all the rooms save one, which we allotted to George and the maid, the wide-apart "slabs" of the floors afforded ample space for a lobster to pass through, the entrance of any of the insect tribe was a matter

of no marvel whatever. My chiefest terror was, lest snakes should come in too; but although many large ones were seen and killed very near the house, I never saw one within it.

Tarantulas straggled along with impunity in all directions, unless so near that I apprehended their crawling on me; and then the idea of those eight great long woolly hairy legs, and that fat black body, traversing any portion of my own person, generally conquered my humanity, and the intruder died.

One of our few amusements was, burning trees down, and no one would marvel at such an occupation becoming quite an exciting pursuit, had they seen how cruelly the tall gaunt trees shut out the morning sun. In winter, if the sun rose at half-past seven, not a glance of his glorious face reached our chilly den before ten o'clock: we seemed to be living, as they say Truth does, at the bottom of a well, and we did what we could to excavate an opening towards the sunshine.

Selecting our victim-tree, we first made up a bundle of the driest leaves, grass, and bark inside, if it were partially hollow, as was generally the case; and after lighting this with a lucifer-match,

and fanning up a bright blaze, we carried to it quantities of loose wood and bark, the latter commodity being very abundant everywhere, the gum-trees shedding their outer skin yearly, which lies about in all directions, some of it like gigantic pieces of cinnamon, many feet long, and some sorts in wider and flatter flakes, but all highly combustible. When a good heap rose against the first tree, and the fire grew too fierce to approach, we carried a "fire-stick" to another, and made up our blazing pile there too, pursuing the same system with five or six, by which time the first fire required replenishing. Many of the logs that we dragged to our fires were the abodes of numerous kinds of ants, most of which *nip* rather sharply, but of some the sting is venomous and agonizing in the extreme.

We were busily employed in this way one evening (the working party consisting of the papa, mamma, and George, with the nursemaid and baby Charles looking on), when a piercing shriek from poor George alarmed us with the idea that a snake had bitten him; he sprang up into the air twice or thrice, far higher than he could have jumped with his utmost exertion at another time, and then rolled

on the ground still shrieking fearfully. I carried him away from the spot, and then saw the cause of the mischief; a large black ant, above an inch long, was on the poor child's instep, still stinging him through his sock. Their sting is very long, and Mr. Meredith describes the pain as resembling what we may imagine would be that of a sharp red-hot iron forced into the flesh. In twenty minutes or half an hour it abates, and gradually goes away, leaving a blister like a mosquito-bite. On another occasion; the luckless boy had one of these horrible creatures in the leg of his trousers, and before it could be removed, he was severely stung in nine places. I have frequently detected them running over me, but have always escaped being stung. Once, as I lay on the sofa reading, I observed one very deliberately walking along my collar, carrying an enormous buzz-fly in his nippers.

A species of ant somewhat smaller than these, black, with yellow forceps, is as much or more to be dreaded, as they sting with equal severity, and can jump a considerable distance in pursuit of any one who molests them.

Our burning trees often formed very beautiful

objects at night, sometimes taking the semblance of ruined towers, with windows and loopholes defined in glowing fire, and showers of sparks falling from the summit. Some would burn internally to a great height, and then burst forth in volumes of flame, many feet from the ground, throwing out great jets, like gigantic fireworks, lighting up all the surrounding gloom.

I have not yet alluded to one of the most constant and unpleasant pests to which these colonies are subject, namely, the great brown disgusting buzz-flies, which continue to torment us all the year round, and in summer swarm most offensively and destructively. Our old English blue-bottle fly is, it is most true, a very noisy fellow, and seems fond of dissipated company, in butchers' shops, &c., and in summer sometimes greatly disturbs one's lonely reverie, by testing the hardness and reverberatory powers of our ceilings and windows in his riotous bumping flight about a room. But here, his brown ill-looking relatives are not content, like him, with a summer reign,—they bump about us the twelve months through, and in numbers incalculable. Now, as I write, some forty or fifty are careering through the room,

knocking* up against the windows, and buzzing most abominably; whilst the difficulty of excluding them from the larder, and the destruction they occasion in it, are two important items in the catalogue of colonial household plagues. The small house-fly is here, as elsewhere, very troublesome too; but though these swarm in immense numbers during the summer months, they are more endurable than the "brown buzzes."

A new kind of small fly has appeared in Van Diemen's Land within the last few years, which is generally known as the "Port Philip fly," and supposed to have been brought from thence. It closely resembles the common house-fly; but, instead of the outspreading sucker-proboscis of the latter, its head is furnished with a tapering black tube, the narrow end of which it inserts, with a sharp piercing bite, into the skin of men or animals, and commences sucking the blood most actively, often leaving a drop on the surface of the skin. To horses it is a terrible torment, and seems chiefly to abound in the vicinity of stables and straw-yards.

One of the insects which I most dreaded was the "wood-tick," an unpleasant-looking creature,

very much resembling those which infest sheep, but possessing a great *penchant* for a residence under the human skin, into and beneath which it eats its way until nearly hidden from sight, without any pain to the person attacked for the first several hours, so that it often escapes notice until the intolerable aching of a large portion of the body surrounding it leads to the detection of the insect, which must then be pulled or cut out. These ticks live among wood, and are sometimes brought into the house with the fuel. I have frequently seen them on my dress or habit, when walking or riding in the "Bush," and have on two occasions been bitten: once on the throat, by a small one which had been several hours at work; it had buried its head entirely, and required a strong pull with tweezers before it could be extracted, the creature being as hard as bone, and very toughly jointed. I felt very little pain afterwards on this occasion; but the second of the insidious little miners, which also attacked me on the neck, was a much larger specimen, and it had begun to cause a most distressing ache in my shoulder, neck, and arm, which I attributed to rheumatism, until, on passing my hand over my dress, I detected its round hard body,

which was too firmly attached for me to pull it away myself. After it was removed, I suffered great pain and numbness in the arm and shoulder for several days.

CHAPTER XIV.

Church-building.—Public Worship.—Deficiency of Religious Instruction. — Rustic Costumes. — Leather “Leggings.”—Progressive Love-tokens.—Marriage.

AT the period of our arrival, no church had been as yet erected at Port Sorell, and the roads of the district were so impassable from bogs, for nine months of the twelve, that had there been one, no congregation could have met oftener than ten or twelve Sundays in the year. Still, the absence of all semblance of a place of public worship for members of the Church of England (whilst, even in a yet poorer neighbouring settlement, an Independent chapel and minister were maintained, chiefly by poor sawyers) became too glaring to continue; and it was proposed to erect a cheap wooden building by means of subscriptions. This design, after considerable delay, was carried out:

one person subscribing so many "slabs;" another, a certain quantity of weather-boards; a third, the requisite "sawed stuff;" a fourth, the shingles; a fifth, the blacksmith's work; a sixth, the "lend" of a bullock-team, and so on; very few payments being made in money. Unfortunately, instead of being placed on the township, in the centre of the population, where a glebe and burial-ground might have been obtained from the Government, the little building was set up on a private property, too much encumbered with mortgages for the requisite gift of the site to be legally made without considerable expense, and consequently the consecration could not take place; but when merely the rough shell was set up, our energetic and accomplished Bishop came down and assisted at the first celebration of Divine service, before a larger congregation than could have been expected in such a place.

Nearly a year elapsed before any clergyman was appointed; and then service was only performed on one Sunday in a month, by the missionary chaplain of Deloraine, the Rev. Montagu Williams. He came to Port Sorell, a distance of forty miles, at the end of every fourth week, to officiate on the

Sunday morning at the little church, and in the afternoon at the police office.

Such, and so rare, are the opportunities for public worship in the wilds of Tasmania!

Surely the munificent gifts and bequests which so many pious persons at Home make for the purposes of church-building and endowment, in towns and cities where scores of churches already stand, might be extended to such a far-away nook as this island, where, from the peculiar condition of a large number of the inhabitants, the need of instruction is so great, and the means so small! The amount of good which might be effected by the ministry of truly Christian conscientious clergymen would be very great indeed.

Did the power and the means of supplying such rest with our earnest-hearted and benevolent prelate, it were well for us all, but more especially for the poor and ignorant of his diocese. But, if persons ever so notoriously unfit for holy orders are appointed here from Home, his judgment and conviction of the impropriety and mischief of such appointments cannot effect a change unless their commission of errors be as glaring as their omission of duties. We must, therefore, patiently endure

the evil, knowing meanwhile that, with the same means, an infinite amount of good would result, under different circumstances.

I have often remarked the difference which exists between the outward aspect of farm labourers here and in England : whether attributable to the various trades and callings here amalgamated into the same occupations, or to the sea-voyage, or to both of these together, I know not ; but certain it is, that no British village ever sent forth such nondescript toilettes as I have seen here on a Sunday. Latterly, the increase of country shops in the colony, and the variety of cheap ready-made coats of all shapes, fabrics, and prices, have caused wonderful innovations in the dress of all classes, although still permitting a great display of original taste.

Red or blue flannel serge shirts are universally worn by labourers in cold or wet weather as a working dress, generally hanging loosely over other garments, or fastened blouse-wise by a leather belt ; and when these are new and bright, they are sometimes permitted to form part of the Sunday outfit.

The stock-keepers seem a perfectly-distinct class

in point of dress, a subject which I conceive costs them some pains, from the ingenious incongruities often displayed ; all evidently aiming at something dashing, and of rather a sporting cast. We have often wondered where such oddly-cut and thoroughly queer-looking coats, hats, and other garments were procured, until a little circumstance which occurred lately threw some light on the interesting subject. Mr. Meredith was one day in a Jew slop-seller's shop in Launceston, making some purchases for our servants, when a labouring man came in, and desired to see some black hats. Immediately the counter displayed a selection of the most unaccountable shapes, chiefly very tall, and with scarcely any brims ; but as even those were deemed too broad by the customer, he went away in search of narrower ones, the shopman remarking, " Oh ! I see you are quite a dandy ! you want to be *too* flash altogether."

And in reply to Mr. Meredith's inquiries, he said that they were obliged to keep these extraordinary articles for such men, who would buy no other, and were as fastidious and particular " as any fine lady ;" whilst we, in our innocence, had commiserated them for being victimized by the shopkeepers, and

having goods foisted upon them which were otherwise unsaleable.

Having thus touched on the delicate topic of taste in dress, I must not confine my observations to the servants, whilst their masters in many instances are yet more removed from the customary aspect of persons in the same station at Home. The true gentleman, whether at home or abroad, is as certain to avoid any uncouth peculiarity of attire, as the ambitious "snob" is to adopt it; and colonial country life exemplifies the fact abundantly. The most striking feature in the costume of such worthies on the north side of our island is, a description of rough brown leathern casing for the legs, neither trouser, gaiter, nor boot, but a loose, wrinkled, bagging, dirty, slovenly, hedger-and-ditcher kind of envelope, worn both in winter and summer, and usually slung to the waist by a multitude of straps and a belt, looking like a surgeon's dressing for a fracture, ill put on; and in dirty weather the loose puckers about the ankles serve as such capacious receptacles for mud, that the exit of visitors so arrayed is the signal for the entrée of the housemaid, to remove the evidences of their sojourn from carpets and floors. When these

hideous leggings are companioned (as I *have* seen them, and on *soi-disant* esquires, too) by a hat of white felt or black oil-skin, a striped shirt, with a blue serge one by way of blouse, and a tremendously heavy long whip in full play, the refined and *recherché* effect of the combination may be imagined!

As to the tender question of *esquirearchy*, I am convinced that the only prudent principle now is, to bestow the envied title on every one alike—on the friend you invite to partake your dinner, and the butcher from whom you bought it. All this has a strong affinity to some of the ways of the “far West,” not a little aided in effect by an odd use of old words, and a puzzling adaptation of new ones, which, although less racy and graphic than some of our American friends’ ingenious coinages, are essentially un-English.

As all my prisoner women-servants have had suitors in plenty, I have sometimes been amused by quietly observing the growing symptoms of the tender passion, as exemplified (in their class of life) by the unfailing presents and love-tokens offered by the enamoured swain as symbols of his sincere attachment, and signs of progress made. The

campaign not unfrequently opens with the bold demonstration of a gay print gown, especially if the arrival of a hawker's cart at the kitchen-door has afforded so excellent an opportunity for the display of rustic gallantry. The presentation of a bonnet and ribbons I look upon as a decidedly serious advance, and in some cases a few yards of calico often give a grave aspect to the affair; a shawl, too, is considered a very affecting thing, and I have known a lace cap on the head exercise a mighty influence over the heart; but the grand conclusive stroke of all, the true love-philter, the unerring omen that bids me seek a new handmaiden, is—when the bolt of Cupid comes wrapped in flannel! Print gowns and new bonnets are, no doubt, shrewd pleaders; ribbons and lace, too, are insinuating things; and shawls and calico may mean much; but when the courtship takes the shape of flannel, I know the work of wooing has sped—the damsel's heart is won; and that the next thing will be John's awkward round-about request for leave to “keep company with Mary;” which is very quickly followed by Mary's sheepish presentation of the “memorial for marriage,” with—“If you would please, ma'am, to ask the master to please to recom-

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mend us!" And married they are, shortly after, if the lover is in a situation to maintain a wife, which the superior powers very rightly desire to know, before authorizing the marriage.

CHAPTER XV.

A Winter at Port Sorell.—Four Months' Rain.—Voyage to Launceston.—The Town Wharf.—Journey to Hobarton.—Sir Eardley Wilmot.—Sketching Epidemic.—Exhibition.—A Fern Valley.—Cabs.—Mrs. Bowden's "Anson" Discipline.—Female Servants.—Religious Instruction.

WE had thought it sufficiently unpleasant to be located for a whole summer in the forest, although during that time we could occasionally make a *sortie* from our wooden walls, and breathe the sea-air. But the approach of winter, and the conviction that the whole of its dreary days must pass before we could finally escape from our Castle Dismal, was in truth a severe trial of endurance. If even sunshine lost its brightness in that sombre forest gloom, what a thrice-dreary aspect did it wear in those days, and weeks, and months of almost incessant rain! Sometimes it rained very hard, and sometimes harder still; sometimes like a continuous thunder-shower, and sometimes in one

mighty sheet of water, like an upper ocean that had burst its bounds. The ground was always something wetter than a bog, and most often resembled a flooded river: such were the pleasant varieties we enjoyed; and when Mr. Meredith's horse used to be brought in a morning for him to ride down to the police-office, it came beside the veranda for him to embark, as a boat would alongside a ship, for a lagoon lay between the house and the garden gate, where he usually mounted; and the whole road he had to traverse was an alternation of deep water, shallower water, and bogs.

Four pouring months at length wept themselves out; spring found me slowly recovering from a severe illness, and, by way of restorative, brought us the official intelligence that the intended reductions in the police department, consequent on the low condition of the Government finances, would inevitably include the magistracy of Port Sorell—a pleasant climax to our troubles! more especially as our own cottage was begun, on the land we had purchased, and must be paid for, whether required or not. Spring, under these circumstances, became rather more melancholy than even winter itself; but happily the sky of our changeful fortunes was

subsequently brightened by the intelligence that the threatened reductions were postponed *sine die*, and the hope that our pleasant sea-side home would receive us before autumn.

A kind invitation at this time from the Lieutenant-Governor, our good and valued friend, Sir Eardley Wilmot, to visit him in Hobarton, promised us a most pleasant and welcome change of scene and society; and we accordingly arranged for our temporary excursion, and our final departure from "Lath Hall" at the same time; determining to take up our abode, on our return, in the new cottage by the sea, however unfinished it might be, rather than dive again into the depths of the forest.

Rapidly and most cheerfully was the work of packing-up proceeded with, and within a week from the first consideration of our removal, I and the children and the nursemaid were, one bright morning at eight o'clock, sitting on the deck of the smart little cutter the "Hope" (of about 15 tons), which was cleaned out and furbished up especially for our accommodation, and bound to Launceston expressly in our service, Mr. Meredith remaining behind to complete the dismantling of "Lath Hall," and purposing to ride up and meet us in town.

A fair wind carried our little vessel into Port Dalrymple by ten o'clock, when we got into smooth water; a very welcome change after the heavy swell we had suffered from during our short sail through the straits, which knocked our little bark about very roughly, and occasioned us considerable indisposition.

Launceston lies about forty miles from the sea-coast, and the voyage thither, up the Tamar, is very monotonous. George Town is a scattered little settlement on the low shores of a small but secure cove at the mouth of the estuary, a few miles above the lighthouse; on the opposite shore, near Kelso Bay and York Town, are some productive farms and gardens, but the George Town side is a mere barren, sandy waste, producing nothing. Although situated several miles from the sea, George Town is sometimes frequented by families from the interior of the island for the summer pleasures of bathing and boating, the weekly visit of the steamer from Launceston giving every facility of access.

The scenery on the Tamar is of the tamest possible description, although the river forms many fine bends in its course. The land on the banks is

generally low, but yet rising sufficiently to shut out any distant view. Here and there the quiet smooth little slopes unexpectedly display a feeble attempt at the romantic, in a few protruding rocks of very mild and subdued aspect; the most striking point is named "Brady's Look-out," after a notorious bush-ranger of years gone by, who is said to have been "planted" (*i. e.*, concealed) there for some time; but the tokens of busy industry which meet the eye at several bends of the river are pleasanter subjects for contemplation. Here stands a large well-built steam flour-mill, with its owner's comfortable cottage, garden, and out-buildings; and, close by, a very pretty little church: there is a busy shipwright's establishment, with one fine vessel nearly ready to launch, another standing in its skeleton, and all the surrounding methodical confusion of new boats and old boats of all sizes, large and small, timber of all descriptions, smoking and pleasant-smelling pitch cauldrons, neat cottages and workshops, and a busy buzz of voices, and sounds of hammering and singing coming cheerfully towards us as we glide along.

Heavily-laden clumsily-shaped wood-boats toiled slowly up the stream, carrying fuel to Launceston,

and making our progress seem rapid by comparison, until some neat, sharp, smart, whaleboat, with its well-feathered oars and clever lug sail, darted past us in the most provoking manner, and almost proved us to be resting motionless on the water. The wind had become so light and fitful that we scarcely seemed to make any way, and I began to think about making up our beds on board for the children; but a few friendly puffs came to our aid, and at sunset we were in sight of Launceston, which, viewed from the water at a proper distance, and no doubt a little beautified in my eyes by my anxious desire to reach it, looked positively pretty.

The situation of the town seems to me very ill-chosen, as at a short distance below it the river is crossed by a bar, over which laden vessels of any large size cannot pass; and accordingly when ships come in, they are compelled to anchor below the bar, until so far unloaded as to permit their crossing it, when they take up their position at the town wharf, until about to sail again, and then they drop down past the provoking bar, before completing their cargo. The placing a shipping port in such a position, when, for forty miles below, the river is navigable for a "seventy-four," seems an un-

accountable blunder, and one which, combined with the unhealthy situation, must, it would seem, eventually lead to the decline of the town of Launceston, and the selection of some more eligible locality for the site of our northern metropolis.

The channel at the bar is so narrow that two vessels cannot cross it together, and we had to wait until another of the coasting craft had preceded us; the little "Hope" looking very humble indeed beside three great merchantmen which were waiting there to unload, their huge black sides towering up above us like great walls, and the people on their decks looking down as if they were on a tall house-top and we in the street below.

It was quite dark when we reached the wharf, and our little vessel was then compelled to take up a berth outside of the steamer and two other vessels, across the decks of which we passed to the shore, not without my suffering enough terror and anxiety for a life in the few minutes of our transit; the spaces between the vessels, and the deep water below, gaping like open traps to seize something precious belonging to me. Our good "skipper" (who knew how anxious I had been to get on shore), and all sorts of strange men, immediately

began running off in the most kind but provoking way with my children and our baggage. I saw trunks, carpet-bags, and bedding dodging about in the fitful gleams, like things possessed; and, utterly despairing of being able to control matters any longer on board, I followed in the wake of a conspicuous roll of mattresses, until I found myself beside a heap of my property—children, maid, and trunks—all safely huddled together on the wharf, guarded by the “Hope’s” mate, who soon called a cab for us. With a stodge of small folks and small packages inside, and a pile of trunks and bedding following, we drove to our hotel, highly pleased at having had so quick a passage, for vessels are often a fortnight in going this short distance (about sixty miles), owing to contrary winds, fogs, and other obstacles; and Mr. Meredith, to provide for such an untoward delay, had insisted on my packing up a commissariat large enough for a voyage to New Zealand at least, which became an acceptable and additional perquisite to the “Hope’s” good people.

At four the next morning we took our seats in the coach for Hobarton, and arrived there the same evening soon after eight, a distance of 120 miles.

The fearfully fast driving was the chief drawback to the pleasure of the journey: the scenery is in many parts very beautiful, but the feeling of terror with which I was possessed, lest the constantly-threatened upset should take place, left me little power to appreciate or enjoy it. The unfortunate horses are flogged unmercifully, and driven for the greater part of the way, up hill and down, and often down very steep hills, too, at a furious gallop. No such precaution as locking a wheel is ever heard of! The result has been shown with terrible regularity by the paragraphs of the weekly papers, recording "serious and fatal accidents," fractures and injuries of all kinds sustained by the passengers, all consequent on the senseless and pernicious system so obstinately pursued.

Between two and three months passed very pleasantly at Hobarton (Mr. Meredith joining me occasionally, when he could leave Port Sorell), in our delightful sojourn at Government House, with the late—alas! that he is gone!—kind-hearted, witty, generous Sir Eardley Wilmot, and in visiting our relatives and other friends in the vicinity.

The utter and flagrant falsehood of the cowardly and cruel accusations made by anonymous slan-

derers against our late Lieutenant-Governor has long since been so well exposed, that I should pass over all allusion to so lamentable a topic, and one so painful now to touch upon, but that our visit happened to take place at the very time when, as it was wickedly declared, "*No ladies ever visited at Government House.*" Such affirmations are always best met by simple facts. Mr. Meredith and myself, and two other families (husbands, wives, and children), were resident guests there. Sir Eardley Wilmot's agreeable dinner-parties were attended by all whom he thought worthy or desirable to invite; and a ball, the cards for which were issued during our stay, and only gave the short notice of one day and a half, was thronged by all the visitable world of Hobarton and the vicinity, the company very possibly including some of the heartless maligners themselves, although I am rather tempted to believe that the reports emanated from disappointed suitors for admission to Government House. Candid and open-hearted, perhaps even to a fault, in this world of hypocrisy, highly refined and witty himself, and keenly appreciating wit and intelligence in those around him, Sir Eardley Wilmot rarely took prudent pains to disguise his feelings of indifference

towards the dull, the pompous, or the vulgar, and consequently created some mortal foes, who, aided by the ready credulity of a puritanical minister, aimed but too surely the assassin's blow at his honour and peace of mind.

* * * * *

After so perfect a seclusion as I had lived in for years, it was exceedingly pleasant to find myself once more in society ; and the change which, during those five years, had taken place in the thoughts and habits and general tone of conversation among the good Hobartians, though perhaps scarcely perceptible to themselves, was agreeably evident to me.

Among other more important matters, I found that the prevalent fashionable epidemic, instead of betraying symptoms of the ancient Berlin-wool influenza or the knitting disorder, had taken an entirely new turn, and that a landscape-sketching and water-colour fever was raging with extraordinary vehemence among the usually too placid and apathetic sons and daughters of Tasmania. The infection had been originally brought by Mr. Prout, the fame of whose very clever water-colour drawings of the scenery in New South Wales, and the celebrity he attained there, had prepared for him a

glad welcome in Van Diemen's Land; and the exquisite art which he taught and practised so well at once became *the fashion par excellence*. All the young ladies, and many elder ones, immediately discovered (or coveted, which is nearly the same) a great taste for drawing, and all commenced taking class lessons from Mr. Prout in out-of-doors sketching. Stationers' shops and fancy repositories were straightway stripped of all their pencils, colours, and sketch-books, and Mr. Prout's absence from Hobarton for the summer vacation alone prevented me from joining his disciples.

An exhibition of paintings, drawings, engravings, &c., was opened after I left town, composed of contributions from the collections of the residents and the works of colonial amateurs and artists. I greatly regretted not being able to see it, but the knowledge that such a thing was achieved at all was exceedingly pleasant, and seemed a good omen of future advancement; and from all accounts of the exhibition which I read and heard, it was a highly satisfactory and creditable beginning. One more having taken place since, I trust we may anticipate that they will be continued at intervals, if not regularly.

There are some pretty fern-tree thickets at the foot of Mount Wellington, and I visited one with a large party; but after seeing our perfectly wild and untrodden fern valley at Port Sorell, this oft-frequented one, the beloved of sketching and pic-nic parties, seemed almost uninteresting. The ferns, as they ever are, were verdant and graceful, though rather small, and the gurgling brook was pretty; but the empty champagne bottles which bristled beside the rocks, and the corks and greasy sandwich papers lurking amongst the moss, savoured considerably more of the creature comforts than the picturesque.

Regattas, balls, dinner-parties, and pic-nics wear so much the same aspect wherever they flourish in English society, and Tasmanian society is, I rejoice to say, so essentially English, that a chronicle of my pleasant sojourn in our antipodean metropolis might serve for a chronicle of any equally pleasant sojourn in any nice town of the United Kingdom, and so, needless to particularize in a gossip chiefly devoted to less civilized matters.

The great number of very comfortable carriages which ply for hire both in Launceston and Hobarton is an essential public convenience, and a great

advance from olden times, when the one or two vehicles of the kind in town would be engaged on a ball night to convey thirty or forty parties each. Now, long strings of smart clean cabs (so called, though more of the chaise and barouche species) stand in several of the public thoroughfares, and can be as cheaply hired as similar carriages could be in England: at the time I was there, 1s. per mile, or 3s. by the hour, was the usual fare.

My nursemaid had become far too much enamoured of the charms and gaieties of the city to think with any composure of a return to the solitude of bush life, and I found it requisite to supply her place. She had been my first trial of the effects of Mrs. Bowden's system of female discipline on board the "Anson," and for a year and a half had been all I could desire in a servant, irreproachable in her conduct, clean, cheerful, and industrious, until the visit to town, and the greater opportunities for showing her pretty face, caused neglect of her duty, and an alarming exhibition of pink silk stockings, thin muslin dresses, and other town vanities. I again applied to Mrs. Bowden, and had again cause to appreciate the value of her influence, not so much in the fitness of the woman

I selected for the situation she was to fill (for at first she was awkward and uncouth in the extreme), as in the almost miraculous change which must have been wrought in her to fit her for any decent occupation whatever. She had, as I afterwards discovered, been reared amidst the worst of the bad—had been imprisoned in some dozen different gaols, and no sooner liberated than, partly from destitution, partly from inveterate habit, she had sinned again, to be again punished. At last she was transported, and after remaining the usual period (six months, I believe) under Mrs. Bowden's government, she came to me a willing, orderly, thankful creature, and remained with us a year and a quarter, when she married comfortably. How different to her former wretched, lost condition!

Simply judging from the superior usefulness, willingness, and orderly, decent, sober demeanour of the women I have taken from the "Anson," over all others of their unfortunate class that I have known, I must believe the system pursued there by Mrs. Bowden to be an excellent and effective one, and rendering the greatest possible benefit to the colony generally.

The women always seem to feel great gratitude

and reverence for Mrs. Bowden, which her earnest solicitude for their well-doing, and her own exalted character and endowments, well deserve; they also express much attachment to her female assistants, or "officers," as they are termed. Once, soon after my first "Anson" girl had arrived, I was going to write to Mrs. Bowden, and called Jane to ask if she would like me to say anything from her, when I received this somewhat startling reply,—

"Oh! if you please ma'am, to give my best thanks and duty to Mrs. Bowden, and my kind love to all the officers!"

Eight or nine pounds a year are the wages I have always given to the female prisoner-servants at first, raising them afterwards, if deserved. Free women expect much higher terms, are not a whit better, but often worse than the prisoners, and are under less control. *All* are certain of marrying, if they please; *proposals* are plentiful, inconveniently so, indeed, sometimes, to masters and mistresses, when tidy handmaidens are wooed, won, and married in such quick succession that new servants have constantly to be sought, and their passage paid. But a suitable marriage is so probable and legitimate a means of reformation, that we never place

obstacles in the way of such good intentions. Those prisoner-women who settle in the country, with few exceptions, behave well and industriously. I know many wives of this class who keep their husbands' little cottages as clean and tidy as any honest English village dame could do, and wash or sew, to earn a little money themselves. An addiction to *drink* is the chief temptation to be feared; if they resist that, all goes well. Many of them have no family, and the spare shillings and pounds are only too likely to go to the publican or the "sly grog seller," which is still worse, being illegal as well as wrong. The temperance-pledge and the savings-bank seem to be the two most efficient life-boats, in such chances of moral wreck; but it is only the naturally determined and resolute among the well-meaning who have courage to adopt them. Religious instruction, if adequate, would do much; the beneficial influence of really conscientious, sincere Christian ministers would be immense, among the lower classes in the country here—those who would go among the poor and ignorant, and win them back to the right path by earnest gentle counsel and kindly admonition; whose own lives, pure and simple themselves, should be ever before

their erring brethren as a living testimony of the great Example they preach; those who would be seen more often on the poor man's threshold than at the rich man's table; who would practise charity as well as preach it, and watch that no beam obscured their own eye, whilst spying out the mote in their brother's. I have, I know, before alluded to this subject; but the lamentable inadequacy of the means of instruction for the lower classes in this colony is so great, that the fact can scarcely be too often reiterated. The deficient number even of *professors* of religion, and the sad apathy and indifference of some among them, ask most urgently for a change.



POYSTON.

CHAPTER XVI.

Return Home.—Route over Badger Head.—The Asbestos Hills.—
The New Cottage.—Goats and their Kids.—Garden.—Bees.—
Native Wasps.—Flies versus Spiders.—Wasps' Nests.—The Dark
Avenger.—Rose-Tree Cuttings.—Wasp-Stings.

IN January, 1846, we returned home by the coach as far as Launceston, passing through, on our way, the populous settlements and towns of Brighton, Bagdad, Green Ponds, Cross Marsh, Oatlands, Ross, Campbelltown, and Perth, all containing good churches and inns, and the greater number displaying shops of various kinds, and many sub-

stantial houses ; whilst nearly the whole length of the road traverses inclosed and cultivated land, and constantly leads us past comfortable country houses, farms, and cottages, proving a far greater amount of improvement and change from a wild state than our beautiful island is credited with at Home.

Pausing but a day in Launceston, we proceeded in the steam-boat to George Town, expecting to find our little friend the " Hope " there, and in three or four hours more to reach Port Sorell. But a perverse westerly wind, which had been blowing for some days, still continued, and after waiting idly two days at George Town, without a symptom of any change, Mr. Meredith was obliged to return home ; and, as I decidedly declined the alternative of remaining with the children and maid at a dull little inn, we determined to make our way across, over Badger Head, a track which was described to us as all but impassable.

A kind settler at Kelso Bay, opposite George Town, to whom Mr. Meredith applied for assistance, promised us the loan of a horse-cart and two riding horses, and on the third morning of our reluctant sojourn we took a boat, and crossed over Port Dalrymple, to the pleasant home of our new friend,

and shortly set forth on our route, the servant and children occupying the cart. I had not even put on a shawl, knowing so well the torment of any dispensable encumbrance in a fatiguing scramble like the one we contemplated.

A very rough road led us for some miles through bush and swamp, and finally brought us near to the sea-beach at the foot of the dreaded Badger Head. Here we found two of the constables and our groom awaiting us, Mr. Meredith having sent a foot messenger to them the day before; but we could not have our own horses brought to meet us, there being no safe means of crossing them over the deep broad channel of Port Sorell, on the western shore of which lay the settlement and our house, whilst Badger Head was some dozen miles eastward from it. The cart, which had brought the children so far, now went home again, and the men carried them onwards up the steep ascent. The horses were led up, with many a perilous plunge and desperate effort, scrambling like goats to keep a footing; and I clambered and climbed along, brave in the resolution of well accomplishing the task I had voluntarily undertaken, and anticipating a succession of such difficulties, if not

greater ones. On gaining a tolerably level space, I inquired of our servant, "How much more of the road is as steep as the last bit?" And I began to think how much good heroism had been needlessly aroused in me, when he replied, "Oh! ma'am, that's all, except one ugly gully, a few miles further on."

The brow of the hill we had gained commanded a most glorious sea-view; east and west of us lay broad smooth sandy beaches, stretching away for miles, with the long white ridges of the in-coming tide breaking in five or six successive lines of snowy spray; and the deep sea beyond, blue as the heavens, lay heaving and sparkling in the sunshine. Several distant vessels were in sight, looking not half so big as the gulls and red-bills that circled and screamed beneath us. It was a Tasmanian version of Edgar's gaze from Shakespeare's cliff, only lacking the samphire gatherers.

The wild wide moorland tracts of the Asbestus Hills, which we now passed over, were but thinly wooded, the chief growth being the lesser kind of grass tree, with its tall clubs sticking up like a vast assemblage of long rusty pokers, with the handles downwards. A great part of the land had been

recently burned, and the beds of light ashes made a most unpleasant dust as we passed along.

The "ugly gully" was easily passed. Mr. Meredith, choosing to avoid the precipitous descent commonly known, explored a new way, for us higher up, the only obstacles we found being the dense, strong, interwoven masses of tall shrubs and ferns which completely occupied it, and through which we pushed our way on foot, with some exertion certainly, but with perfect success; and again walked on, over grass-tree moorlands, as before.

On reaching a bright little spring of fresh water in a ravine near the beach, about three in the afternoon, we rested to eat our sandwiches, and determined to send back from thence our good friend's horses, as it was then early enough for them to reach home by dark, and if we had taken them on to the shore of Port Sorell they must have been tethered all night in the Bush, a very sorry guerdon for the good service they had done us!

We rested about an hour, and had then five miles to walk to the point where the police boat would meet us; and, so long as we continued on

the hard smooth beach, our progress was easy and pleasant, but an abominably rough, scrubby, soft sand-bank of a mile wide, which we were wrongly advised to cross, instead of following the course of the beach, was a sad fatigue and difficulty at the end of our journey: a right gladsome sight, therefore, was her Majesty's trim boat, lying off "Dead Man's Point," just at twilight, ready to receive our weary party. Crossing to the police office, we took up our abode for the night in Mr. Meredith's private room, every member of the establishment being ready and eager to assist and serve us; and our good old servant soon came down from our unfinished cottage, with such a wonderful basket of cold roast wild ducks, chicken, ham, eggs, bread, butter, and "sundries," as proved that the new kitchen had well begun its duties by preparing for our reception.

The next morning we breakfasted at Poyston, our new home, named after my husband's birth-place in Wales. Since I had last visited it, the exterior had been completed, and the trees cleared away towards the sea, opening a most lovely view of the port and its fairy islands, the bold bluff of Badger Head, the grand Asbestus range of mountains,

and the open sea; the western end of the picture being closed by some wooded rocky points and intervening sandy beaches.

My old longing for a home on the sea-coast was now realized; and, rough as everything necessarily was at first, we enjoyed the change from the dark forest to the bright sea-shore too intensely to feel any trifling discomforts. Nearly all the furniture was packed and stowed away in one room, so the first breakfast was spread on the hall table, with packing-cases and trunks for seats.

Our house, which contained large good rooms, was built of wood, with chimneys of brick; the tall thick "slabs" were weather-boarded on the outside, and wholly bare within, as, had they been lathed and plastered at once, their inevitable warping and shrinking would have cracked and destroyed the plaster. The ceilings were all done in a corduroy pattern, being neatly boarded, with a narrow batten over each joint, and all well whitewashed; a method much more expeditious and durable than plastering, and, in a country cottage, by no means unsightly.

Our inner walls, of the bare, rough, split timber,

full of gaps and crevices, maintained a more universal system of ventilation than even those of "Lath Hall;" yet we all remained wholly unvisited by colds of any kind during the autumn and winter, which passed before the cottage was finished, although, when the wind blew from the north-east (our only exposed quarter), we could scarcely keep candles alight in the house. Strong westerly gales are very prevalent on this coast, but from these our cosy nest was completely sheltered by an amphitheatre of high wooded hills behind.

We kept some goats and their pretty mischievous kids, purposing to have a large herd of them in time, both for milk and meat, cows requiring better pasture than our sandy scrubs yielded, and the Port Sorell mutton having a particularly unpleasant flavour, probably from some prevailing plant eaten by the sheep. With goats for neighbours and play-fellows, it was perfectly useless to make any attempt at gardening, until a strong close paling-fence was put up; and this being done, and a stable, fowl-house, and goat-shed built, we began to look quite civilized and settled in our new home. An old gardener in the neighbourhood resolving to go to Port Philip, we purchased his whole stock of trees,

flowers, thyme-edging, raspberry canes, strawberry plants, pot-herbs, &c., and so gave our young inclosure a two-years old aspect at once.

We also commenced keeping bees, which thrive well at Port Sorell, the abundance of sweet wild flowers there affording them most dainty food, judging from the quality of the honey they make; some of which, from hives kept in the Bush, far from all gardens and ill-flavoured flowers, exceeds in fine delicate flavour any other I ever tasted, the famed honey of Narbonne not excepted. Such portions of the virgin honeycomb as become candied, and cut solid, like cheese, are the nicest of all sweetmeats. Numbers of bees are now wild in many parts of the island, and hollow trees are frequently found in the bush filled with honeycomb.

Several species of wild native bees or wasps are also numerous; and, some time ago, I wrote Home a few observations I had made on their ways and habits, which, as they do not seem to have crept into print, I shall insert, rather than recast the substance of the paper anew.

In the warm summer days, during our residence at Port Sorell, and more particularly in the even-

ings, we had often noticed a large kind of black fly darting in and out of the house with a loud, sharp, whizzing noise; and, on a more attentive observation, we found a most tragic addition made to our list of antipodean contrarieties—nothing less than the discovery of a savage and sanguinary war carried on by flies against spiders, and pursued with such vigour that one would believe the Tasmanian flies were bent on avenging the tyrannies and grievances suffered at the hands of the spiders by the whole winged-insect family all the world over.

We had observed the forcible and noisy abduction of many an unlucky web-spinner, before I could satisfactorily make out what became of them, as the frequent seizures made, apparently by the same fly, forbade the conclusion that they were forthwith devoured; but, by dint of sundry watchings and pursuits of the flies, and by eking out and piecing together my various small scraps of information and discovery, I at length acquired a tolerable knowledge of the habits and practices of my busy black neighbours.

In size and shape they exactly resemble a large English wasp, but are wholly black, and possess

formidable stings, a quarter of an inch long. They build very remarkable cells or nests of earth, finely tempered, and formed in layers of tiny mud-pats, like a swallow's nest. Many of these were placed in a small wooden out-house, between the upright studs and the weather-boarding of the wall; several were formed on a shelf in the porch, where some small pieces of wood lying heaped together offered convenient nooks; and one wasp, resolving to have a more costly lodgment than his friends, took possession of a meerschaum pipe-bowl which lay on the same shelf, and very snugly laid out his house in its interior. All the nests I have examined are arranged in the same manner, the whole fabric being from two to four inches long, and rather less than an inch broad; the external shape of the mansion, whether square, triangular, or pentagonal, depending a good deal on the site chosen. When completed, no aperture is left; but on being opened, three or four cells are usually found, two or three containing each a soft white chrysalis in a cocoon of white web, and the largest apartment of the mansion is devoted to the purposes of a larder, and is always found full of spiders, of all varieties of size, colour, and kind,

all closely and neatly packed together, with their legs trussed up, so as to occupy the smallest possible space. The strangest part of the affair is, that the spiders are not dead, but remain perfectly soft and flexible in every part; and, on being exposed to the sun and air, and stirred, a feeble movement is evident in them, as though they were paralysed or stupified in some manner, so as to be unresisting victims and good fresh meat at the same time. The store-house is thus well supplied, doubtless for the benefit of the chrysalis tenantry, on their awakening to the knowledge of life and appetite.

I have rarely been more interested by any new insect than by these black wasps, ungentle and ferocious though they be; for there is a daring dashing energy and brisk industry about their ways and doings that is very amusing and perfectly original. The bee—dear little hard-working persevering fellow that he is—can still afford time for many a coquettish peep into blossoms and buds that he deigns not to taste; and, even when arrived at home with his two pannier-baskets loaded with their heaped-up golden treasure, can stay for a few moments' friendly hovering to and

fro, and pleasant exchanges of hum and buzz with his helpmates. The ant—whose ways of thrift and industry even Solomon bids us to “consider and be wise”—never takes a straight road, but with a lump of plunder in her nippers thrice her own size, runs hither and thither, up straws and round sticks, or may be into a labyrinth of a violet root, where she plays at bo-peep with you for ten minutes before going forward again, and seems to get on in such a perversely round-about way, that I have only been cured of my inclination to put her straight, by the conviction (after many trials, when anxiously striving to trace out the marauders of my bee-hives) of the utter hopelessness of such attempts.

But the black wasp has none of these wandering weaknesses of character: solitary, stern, ruthless, and resolute, he goes about his work of cell-building and spider-catching. If you chance to be near his chosen place of abode, you may see him dart past with a bit of mud or a victim, and a shrill sharp *whizz-izz-izz* is continued for some seconds or a minute, during the operation of packing away his load, when forth he darts again, straight and swift as an arrow, and the next moment very probably

invades the peaceful retreat of some cobwebbed recluse, who until now, safe from brooms and housemaids, has meshed and devoured his flies in comfort, but is at length seized, trussed, and packed up half-alive, by the dark avenger.

The varieties of wasps or wasp-like flies, which we noticed around Poyston, were very numerous. One is marked with alternate black and golden stripes, very similar to the English wasp, but more soft and downy-looking. Another is red, long and slender, with four long wings and a prodigious sting, which it can protrude nearly half an inch from a kind of double sheath beneath the tail. Another species, partially red, frequented the sandy paths of the garden, where several of them were generally seen darting along, flying straight up and down the walks. I have often followed them nearly round the garden, without their ever quitting the path, or rising more than a foot from the surface. Sometimes they would stop at a hole in the sand, possibly their nest, and after poking down into it, head foremost and tail up, for a minute or more, they made a great skurry of dust over the opening, so as entirely to conceal it, and flew on again.

Without enumerating many more members of this family, of whom I know little more than their outward aspect, I shall mention one more, which has interested me nearly as much as the architect wasp first described, and has caused me to waste infinitely more time in vain attempts to pry more narrowly into its domestic privacy.

At "Lath Hall" I had been annoyed to find that the multiflora rose-trees which adorned the veranda, had, towards autumn, become quite disfigured, by having large round pieces scolloped out of nearly every leaf; five or six great scollops being made in each, leaving the middle fibre entire. First I attributed the mischief to caterpillars, and then to grass-hoppers, but never found any on the trees. At length the frequent buzzing of a large bee-like fly attracted my attention; and on watching its movements I detected it in the act of snipping out a piece of rose-leaf, rolling it up, grasping it in its legs, and flying off. After this I observed the work going on in the same manner daily for some time. Plants, raised from cuttings of these same rose-trees, grew around the porch at Poyston, and these were used by the same busy workmen in the same manner, besides other kinds of roses, and the

leaves of the cherry, acacia, and other trees. This wasp or bee has a pair of forceps, acting precisely like scissors; and very many times I have closely observed him snipping out, with a quick clean cut, the piece of leaf, which is usually about the third of an inch broad and long. Six or eight seconds suffice for the cutting, when the piece of leaf is most nimbly and adroitly rolled up and clasped by the feet and legs, as the wasp flies away. I have frequently started off when the wasps took flight, and given chase to them, hoping to find out whither all the leaves were carried, and how they were used; but the depredators always proved too clever for me, and glanced out of sight, leaving me to come panting back again, vainly vowing to be more agile and sharp-sighted next time.

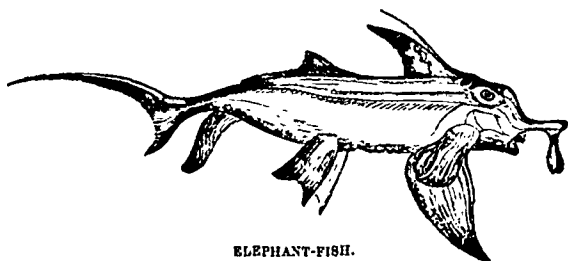
Having often found these insects busy gathering honey, I imagined they must have a hoard or nest somewhere near, but never found any. An intelligent young person who lived with me at this time as nursery governess told me she had often found the nests, which were holes in the ground, filled with bits of leaves, in which small portions of some sweet sticky stuff were folded up and stuck together, only one or two wasps seeming

to inhabit each hole. This species, like all my other acquaintances of the wasp-kind here, has a long sting, and precisely the head and antennæ of the English wasp.

A totally different species from any of these frequented the wide sandy sea-beaches at Port Sorell; these latter were large bulky formidable insects, with great stings like the others, and were often seen on a warm day, darting about in twos and threes, just above the surface of the sand. One of them would sometimes hover over the same spot for a minute or two, when another would suddenly dart to the place, and the first wasp instantly took up his station at some distance, hovering as before, until he either displaced another, or was superseded in his turn; and the same dance of "change sides and back again" went on as long as we watched them; but what they were doing, or how they got their living, remained an undiscoverable mystery to me.

It is only just to all these long-stinged wasps, to add, that neither we nor our children nor servants were ever stung by any of the fraternity, although we frequently chased and captured them

for examination ; but always with a due dread of their threatening weapons of defence, and a careful restoration of their liberty when our curiosity was satisfied.



ELEPHANT-FISH.

CHAPTER XVII.

Fish. — The Blue-head. — Sting-ray. — Bathing. — Crabs. — Shells. — Echini. — Starfish. — Sea Anemonics. — Handsome Cuttle-fish. — Jelly-fish, &c. — A Marine Mrs. Gamp. — Elephant-fish.

ONE luxury which we enjoyed at Poyston was an abundance of excellent fish, with which the old fisherman supplied us twice or thrice a week, to our mutual advantage, for he had few good customers besides, and the impossibility of obtaining even tolerably good meat or poultry rendered the addition of fish to our bill of fare a great acquisition. Excellent flounders (of a much better kind than I remember at Home,) a few soles and guard-fish, plenty of fine bream, and quantities of flat-heads, composed the general assortment, which now and

then included a few oysters, but not any cray-fish.

Mr. Meredith and George often went out fishing in our own nice little boat, the "Sea Egg," but they seldom found wind, and tide, and time, and all other marine influences so propitious as to do much injury to old Donald's trade, a few flat-heads or blue-heads, or a young shark, being their usual booty.

The blue-head is among fish what the rose-hill parakeet is among birds, a miracle of gay colours. It is a large thick fish, with patches of the most vivid blue and orange about the head, and touches of crimson, green, &c., in other parts. It is not very good eating, being, when cooked, almost as soft and watery as mashed turnips.

Great numbers of small sharks were often seen in the port, close in-shore, in such shallow water that we have thought they must be soon aground; and legions of the great ugly sting-rays were always gliding about, now and then turning up their finny elbows as they passed by us or hurried after their prey. Some of them were of an enormous size, and once our boat grounded on one, and it was only when the living island swam

away that it was discovered not to be a shoal. We frequently watched numbers of these great fish in the clear channels, looking, when lying motionless, like black rocks, or masses of kelp, and sometimes moving so slowly as still to deceive the eye, whilst at other times dozens and scores of them would come close by us, in water only deep enough to cover them.

The long barbed bone or "sting" in the tail of these unsightly creatures is from three to six or eight inches long, and capable of inflicting a fearful wound, each of the numerous barbs being jagged at both edges like the teeth of a saw, and lacerating frightfully where it strikes. No savage warrior ever invented a more horrible weapon, and I think some of the hideous implements of destruction brought from the South Sea Islands are made upon its model. A poor man near Port Sorell, in trying to catch some sting-ray by driving them on shore, had one of the stings struck through his thigh, and broken there, and it was with considerable danger cut out, having passed close to one of the great arteries.

Fortunately, neither sharks nor sting-rays ever visited us when bathing, a luxury we enjoyed to

perfection here. Mr. Meredith had a large rustic bower of wattled boughs built for my use on a great flat rock, which made an admirable 'tiring-room, in a sheltered and retired nook of our pretty bay, where we could almost pluck flowering shrubs with one hand, and fish out sea-weed with the other. At first I fear the sea-gulls, as they flew over, must sometimes have been scared by piteous cries from within of "Don't put *me* in, mamma, please don't!" but these vain remonstrances soon ceased, and the plaintive voices changed to joyous shouts, as my young ones splashed about like wild ducks, to the grave amazement of the baby, who watched such terrible proceedings with evident apprehension.

Many a pleasant day was spent in long walks or rides, or boating expeditions in the neighbourhood, and scarcely one passed without our rambling on the beach. The three children spent half their days there winning bright eyes, rosy cheeks, and untold baskets of ocean treasures—shells, corals, and kelp, which were afterwards strewn around the house in all directions. The ever faithful Dick was their constant playmate, and also a black Newfoundland dog, named Pluto, who

at first, when a soft fat puppy, used to ride down to the sands with Charlie in his little carriage, and after growing a great powerful dog, would good-naturedly insist on helping to pull it himself, and a rope was tied on for him, which he took in his mouth, and trotted along with great satisfaction.

At certain times of the tide, the broad beach used to be covered with little purple crabs, as busy stuffing sand into their waistcoat pockets as my old friends of the Homebush drains; and after the crabs had finished their odd repast, the surface of the beach was seen thickly strewn with tiny round pellets of sand, the size of duck-shot, showing how vast an amount of labour the busy little things had accomplished, to be all washed out again by the next wave. We were all careful not to crush the poor crabs, and often they were so thick as to make it difficult to avoid them. Pluto, who was not troubled with philanthropy, used to distress the children by squashing the little animals with his great paws, or picking them up in his huge mouth to play with; whilst our beautiful Dick kept us in constant alarm lest, with his indefatigable nose, he should hunt out the sea-birds' nests, that we knew were close around, and disturb or

kill the young ones, which it was our great delight to have safely reared, and added to our beach companions.

One most noble shell is sometimes found on this coast, a species of volute or *Cymbiola*, ten inches or more in length, and five or six in diameter, of a shaded buff colour, beautifully marked with zig-zag lines of brown, smooth on the outside, and highly polished within, with three plaits on the columella, and the outer lip thin and sharp. I have only seen five of these shells, three of which I procured myself. One had been dead some time, being covered with serpula inside; the other two had not so long parted from their inhabitants as to have also lost the odour which their remains had left behind, and were fresh handsome shells.

Sometimes we found a few smaller volutes of the same kind as at Swan Port, but usually more perfect, being alive; occasionally we captured a lovely Venus, in a marvellous array of ridges and spikes. At some seasons the beach abounded with fine brown date-muscles, alive also, and the *Haliotis*, *Sigaretus*, and *Stomatella* were also found, the former abundantly, and often very large.

A delicate species of *Terebratula* lived on the

reefs, some distance below low-water mark, and I obtained a few live shells, but never found any cast on the sands. One most beautiful *Trigonia* was given to me, as having been picked up on the Badger Head beach, but I was never so fortunate as to find another there.

Coralines abounded, the same as those of Swan Port, and a far greater quantity of the delicate lace-coral, in pieces from two to six or eight inches broad, but too brittle to bear packing. Occasionally, but only rarely, a piece of beautiful pink coral appeared among the common kinds.

Several species of *Echini* frequented the reefs around us, and in the summer we often invaded their bright rocky pools, to make acquaintance with them. At low tide we could run across the wide sands on to several of the reefs, with merely wetting our feet (which no true sea-side scrambler ever pauses to think about, albeit a fearful extension of shoemakers' bills is the result); and then most delightful was it to peer down through the clear water of the countless basins and hollows in the rocks, and see whole families of *Echini*, all unconscious of our alarming presence, rolling to and fro on their ever-moving *chevaux de frise* of

spines, and various species of star-fish, some with short arms, some with long ones, and many with no arms at all, but with merely obtuse corners to their pentagon or hexagon shapes, all most brilliant in colour, and shining amidst floating kelp and through the sunny water, like great marigolds, poppies, and purple anemones; whilst the real sea-anemones, of many bright colours, clustered up and down the rocks, those above water closed up, and looking like the transparent red lollipops which children call "cherries," and the submerged ones spreading out their filmy rays like starry flowers, the mimic petals or arms of which clasp tightly around an intruding finger, as if believing it to be some dainty jelly-fish or other pleasant comestible. I have often watched both these Actinia and the star-fish eating soft jelly-like sea creatures, and have marvelled at the celerity with which they dispatched their meal.

Mr. Meredith and George once found some very beautiful *Asteriæ* on one of the reefs, and carried one home to me; but, despite all their care, it was very much broken before it arrived. The body, hexagonal in shape, was not larger than a shilling, but the arms were at least twelve inches long, and

not more than an eighth of an inch broad, consisting of one series of small shelly scales or plates, with two short feelers to each scale; each arm looking like a very long centipede. Although so much injured, it moved when touched, and then emitted a bright pale blue phosphoric light, which trembled all over it for several seconds, but became gradually fainter, till it was no longer emitted. We never found the same species again.

Very many of the black sea-slugs, or sea-hares, whose shell is known as the *Parmophorus Australis*, also dwelt in our reef-pools, and dead shells were often thrown on the beach. The airy shells of a beautiful *Spatangus*, as thin and white as cambric paper, were also very plentiful, but I never found the creature within them, though very curious to see the animal which could inhabit an abode so fragile that I could scarcely breathe upon it without wafting it away, although some were the size of a good orange.

During one of our boating expeditions to the islands, we found a very handsome individual of a very ugly family, being a species of cuttle-fish, in a coat of bright salmon-colour, profusely trimmed and embroidered with brown, and the multitudinous

arms each dotted with two lines of buttons (*i. e.*, *suckers*) as thickly as the jacket of a lady's page. We tried to send this creature out from his bower of kelp into clearer water, to gain a better view of him; but his extraordinary arms always reappeared where we least expected them, and seemed to be many feet in length, gliding and writhing amidst the kelp forest like a colony of snakes. Some time afterwards I found a smaller specimen of the same creature washed ashore on the sands, and, as it was still alive, I carried it to a deep rocky pool that it might recover; but the horrible sensation of all the strong suckers fastening round my bared wrist and hand was only just endurable, and I gladly felt it loosen its tenacious hold, and glide off into the water.

At some seasons the beach used to be thickly strewn with what are called "jelly-fish," left by the receding tide; most of them being the size of a large dinner plate, and not unlike a great mass of encrusted glass, with a large star pattern within, of pink or purple. When seen swimming they resemble an expanded umbrella, with a cluster of long fringed arms extending from its convex centre. During a short voyage in Bass's Straits, the my-

riads I have seen of these jelly umbrellas were, perfectly astonishing ; every wave passing the vessel contained five or six, and their bright soft iridescent colours of pink, purple, blue, and crimson, seen glancing in the rapid water, were most beautiful.

Several species of curious bony fish are found at Port Sorell. One, about four inches long, is called the dog fish, from the accurate resemblance which its head bears to that of a pointer. Another, which we named the porcupine fish, is about eight inches long, and is armed all over with sharp strong spines. We preserved some of these excellently by suspending them by a thread, near an ant-hill, and in a short time all the skin and form of the fish became dry and hard, whilst the busy little insects had disposed of all the more perishable matter.

One very singular fish, the size and shape of a large egg somewhat compressed at the sides, was arrayed in a complete suit of white bony armour, beautifully embossed and engraved, with sharp fins and tail, and a mouth like a small whistle. It is sometimes found dead and dry among the heaps of old kelp and shells on the sand-banks, but I never saw one either alive or fresh.

A large skeleton of a hideously ugly fish, which none of us knew, was brought me by one of the constables (all of whom used to do their best to contribute to my heterogeneous collections of oddities). Its heavy bony head was more than half of the whole fish, with a large under-jawed bull-dog mouth, and the body tapering sharply off from it, being altogether about two feet long. Mr. Meredith said it somewhat resembled a fish called by whalers "an Old Nurse," and then we decided that it must be the Mrs. Gamp of the ocean. If my lame description is unintelligible to the ichthyologically learned, I can direct them to an admirable portrait of my ugly friend, in Cruikshank's Comic Almanack for 1843, for he has drawn it to the life, in the astonished fish which rushes full in the light from his submarine steamer, to gaze upon the portentous visitant with supercilious indignation.

On passing our fisherman's hut one morning, we found him quite busy, wheeling in a quantity of unsaleable fish to enrich his little potato garden, and we detained one, of a kind new to us, to examine. It was a large fish, nearly three feet in length, and about five inches deep, with a singular

bony head, from which a narrow bony process extended in front, like a very prominent Roman nose, with a turn-up at the point of it; from the end of this hung, outspread, a soft fleshy heart-shaped membrane, three or more inches long. The mouth was placed at some distance behind this, pendulous apparatus, which looked like a bait, with which this odd fish was perpetually angling for himself. A long, strong, sharp spine proceeded from the front of the dorsal fin; and the vertebræ continued through the upper lobe of the tail, tapering finely to the end. I have rarely seen a more singular fish.



CHAPTER XVIII.

Improvements at Poyston.—The Harriet.—A New Bird.—Diamond Birds.—Dragon-flies.—Green Frogs.—Rabbits.—Great Owl.—Small Owl.—Mawpawk.—Bush Fires.—Providential Escape.

WE continued to improve our pleasant sea-side home in various ways, by enlarging the house and garden, by having our rooms plastered and papered, by making some log-bridges across watery hollows in the sand bank, for our winter walks to the beach, and by marking an avenue through the wood, in the direction of the police station, which was partly cleared at our own expense, and partly by the

occasional labour of watch-house prisoners; and, when completed, opened a beautiful vista, ending in a distant view of the station, and the woods and mountains behind, as shown in my little sketch from our garden, given at page 258.

The arrival of the Port Sorell vessels (small schooners and cutters of from fifteen to forty tons) added considerably to the life and interest of our sea view, especially when any friend or long-expected package was known to be on board; and as the reefs and channels of the entrance to the port are rather intricate, we frequently watched the little craft with great anxiety.

We took great interest in a small schooner, which the builder of our cottage (a generally useful native genius) commenced after nearly finishing our house; *perfect* completion of a task we found was impossible to him.

The "Hope" cutter, which I have before mentioned, was also the work and property of our worthy neighbour, but she had been sent to sea at first without a rudder-case, and sailed without that apparently indispensable appendage ever afterwards. His new schooner was very cleverly and accurately modelled after the brig "Scout," formerly a slaver,

and the fastest sailing vessel in these colonies. We could readily distinguish her from all the other ships seen passing through the Straits, bound for, or leaving Launceston, by her superior speed, and were much grieved lately to learn that the beautiful vessel had been wrecked.

We often visited our ingenious neighbour to see how his vessel got on, and anticipated the launch with great interest; but, as I fully expected, something was left undone, or was not done quite enough, in the laying down of the "ways," and instead of dashing boldly into the water, when we were all assembled to see her, the gallant "Harriet" stuck fast, and was unsatisfactorily and ingloriously shoved off in the evening tide, with no one to look at her.

Having by means of the "Mosquito craft" of the vicinity constant opportunities of communication with Launceston, we commenced subscribing to a library there, which, although not very extensive, seemed to promise us a twelvemonth's supply of reading; but after exchanging our books about four times, and sending in vain for more, I discovered that our supply was finally cut off; the whole collection of books having been sold by

auction ! and we were once more reduced to the chance volumes we could borrow, and our own rare and scanty acquisitions from Home.

When living in a new country, and in great measure apart from the advantages of civilized life, it is no small solace and pleasure to possess the habit, apparently so natural, but in reality very rare (at least *here*), of deriving interest and amusement from the perusal of whatever page of the great book of Nature lies open to us ; and strange indeed must be our destiny, if we are ever without some instructive and wondrous passage before us, telling of the beneficence and wisdom of Him who alike hath fixed the track of the mysterious comet through the illimitable immensity of space, and decreed the shape in which the little bees shall make their tiny cells !

In old countries, where every change of season, every successively-opening flower, and every insect that flutters the frailest wing in the sunshine, has attracted the study of naturalists and philosophers for centuries, we can always refer to books for information respecting all that interests us, or excites our curiosity. But here, if we would learn from Nature, we must strive to read her own untranslated

history, and no one who has not tried can tell how pleasant a book it is. Sometimes, it is true, we should like a book of reference, when some quite new bird or flower proves too profound an enigma for our small acquirements. Such was a lovely little creature like a large humming-bird, which came daily to suck honey from the trumpet-flowers of the *Ecremocarpus* creeper round our porch and garden fence. It never perched, but remained on the wing, hovering and sipping the honey with its long hairy tongue, and uttering a low murmuring sound as it skimmed about. Its plumage was chiefly brown and fawn colour, with a long beard-like shadow on the throat. I was quite glad to see the *Ecremocarpus* honey made useful to something, for I had often thought it a pity that the mouth of the flower was too small for the entrance of a bee, whilst so well stored with sweets; and the little bird came as if on purpose to show me that all in Nature must be right and good.

A pair of little gems of diamond birds had their nest in the bank near our cottage. Mr. Meredith found the hole one day, and thought it belonged to a snake, but whilst peeping about it, one of the alarmed little birds flew out, almost in his face.

We visited it several times afterwards, and, on looking steadily into the dark little nest, could just discern the baby-birds within, and often saw the beautiful little parent pair flying or creeping in and out.

Some gigantic dragon flies, larger than the diamond birds, often visited us ; and had, I imagine, emerged from their former more humble condition of existence in our fishpond, as we saw many in its vicinity. I always admired their handsome tribe, but was rather shocked one day to see a very large one snap up a poor heavily-laden bee, and fly off with it. Had I seen many such captures, a declaration of war against the great dragon flies must have followed, but it was a solitary outrage, so far as I know.

Numbers of my old favourites, the gorgeously-attired green frogs, also abode in our pond and brook, and in warm summer days were wont to bathe luxuriously in the sunshine, with their moist gold-threaded heads and backs, and great calm eyes, gleaming like jewels ; and as they sit thus, they keep up a kind of friendly conversational croak with each other, each exclamation being apparently the result of great effort. The speaker suddenly

collapses his portly body, and at the same instant inflates a large white speckled pouch beneath the under jaw, which expands to the size of a small hen's-egg, whilst the croak is going on—the sound and the inflation ceasing together; and in the space of a minute the process begins again. The appearance of a party of frogs thus conversing, seated a few feet apart, over a pond or lagune, is most gravely ridiculous; but a spectator must wait for some time, motionless and silent, before the discourse begins, the approach of any noise or movement, however slight, causing the whole solemn assembly to plop under water.

To our favourite household troops of goats, horses, dogs, cats, tame swans, and poultry, we had now rather a droll addition in a flock of tame rabbits, the progeny of one pair given to the children by our gardener. These had for some time been kept in a hutch, but we decided on giving them their liberty, and had a capacious cage made of paling for them at one corner of our paddock, and put them in it, with a daily supply of food, intending that they should burrow out into the Bush and go free, but still have their safe cage as a retreat from dogs or other molestations. They

very soon availed themselves of the liberty we gave them, and scratched their way out, but, instead of going into the Bush, straightway came back and took up their abode under the kitchen, burrowing an entrance beneath the massive wooden sleepers, and no doubt finding a warm and roomy apartment ready for their reception, as the floor of the kitchen was raised above a foot from the level ground. Here they continued to live, and bred numbers of young ones, which were of all colours, though the old pair were black, and in the evening, a troop of all sizes, black, brown, gray, buff, and white, used to come out and frolic all about us: the old ones were so tame as to jump into our laps as we sat down; and very often used in play to scratch the children's faces, who had taught them to take bread from their lips. The young ones very rapidly spread abroad, and colonized the whole neighbourhood. We, or rather our spaniel, Dick, found several at one or two miles' distance from home. Our garden was so well fenced that only very juvenile bunnies could gain admittance there, and as we had not anything else they could possibly injure, and abundance of food for them, we greatly enjoyed our novel kind of rabbit-warren; the only

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trouble connected with it being our constant fear lest strangers coming to the house should inadvertently tread upon our bold little favourites, which were always trooping about.

The poor old doe fell a victim to the kittenish propensity for play of an Arab colt we had; he used to run after everything, and pawed over dogs, fowls, or anything he could overtake, as a kitten would a ball, and in an unhappy hour, with one playful stroke of his fore-foot, broke a hind leg of our old bunny, so that we were compelled, after ineffectual attempts to set the bone, to let our poor pet be killed as an act of mercy. We never before kept tame rabbits, but these free and sociable ones were exceedingly interesting, and their evening gambols, when the whole family party was assembled, were most graceful and diverting.

I had one day a most unwelcome present brought to me by one of our constables, who, poor man, had taken infinite pains to obtain it, but had wofully mistaken what he conceived to be my wishes in the matter. Hearing that I wanted to procure an owl, he brought me a most magnificent one, but alas! it was dead, and my wish was to have one, or, still better, a pair, alive, to put them

in undisturbed possession of two great lofts in the gabled roof of our house, where they and their progeny might benefit us and themselves by carrying on the mousing business, and gratify us occasionally by a glimpse of their ghostly shapes winnowing silently around in the twilight.

The poor dead bird was a most noble specimen of his order, about fifteen inches in height, and of a broad comely figure, with the proper great heart-face, and very large eyes; the plumage gray and fawn-colour, barred with brown, beautifully soft and downy.

I since had one of the small Tasmanian owls alive, and kept it for some months, feeding it on mice, birds, and raw meat, but I could not tame it in the least. It tore and bit any one it could reach, and always greeted our approach with a savage *chop-chopping* of its beak, that sounded most defiant and ferocious. It was a very handsome bird, six or seven inches high, with dark plumage, and very quick, savagely-bright eyes. Finding I could not by any means render it sociable and friendly, I determined to set it free, hoping it might possibly remain about the house or garden; but the emancipation, so kindly meant, proved fatal.

Unaccustomed to procure food for itself, and teased and attacked by crowds of other birds, it sat moping in a high tree, for a day or two, until pecked blind, and almost in pieces; and I only recovered my perverse pet in time to see it expire in its old cage.

The Mawpawk, More Pork, or Mope Hawk, is common in most parts of the colony, and utters its peculiar two-syllable cry at night, very constantly. Its habits are those of the owl, and its rather hawkish appearance partakes also of the peculiarities of the goat-sucker tribe. The bird is ten or twelve inches long, and the head forms more than a third of this; the mouth, bristling with strong whiskers, opens to the very back of the head, and displays a cavern, apparently capable of accommodating a whole family of mice at once. The eyes are large and hawk-like, the plumage dark and dusky, and the bird's flight is silent as that of the owl. We often listen to them at night, as they answer each other's cry, sometimes from a tree close beside us, and then from the distant woods. The sound does not really resemble the words "more pork," any more than "cuckoo," and it is more like the "tu-whoo" of the owl than either.

The summer bush fires in these forest regions sometimes rage to a fearful extent, from the great masses of dead wood, bark, and scrub which accumulate though successive seasons. During our abode at "Lath Hall" I once suffered great alarm from the very near approach of the bush fires; which, in those dense and lofty forests, have a most terrific appearance, as the volumes of lurid smoke come rolling onwards, and tree after tree bursts into flame; whilst the frequent thundering fall of some mighty trunk, and the crackling and hissing of the blazing mass, are as terrible to hear as to behold. By anticipating the approach of the great body of fire, and carefully burning and beating out the low scrub, ferns, and grass beside fences, or for a considerable breadth in the probable track of the conflagration, any serious mischief may frequently be prevented; but when a high wind prevails at the same time, immense flakes of fire are carried along by it, and falling in distant places, or perchance on thatched roofs, spread the devastation with terrible rapidity.

We had on one occasion a fearful drive home from the house of a friend with whom we had spent the day, and during our stay one of these

tremendous forest fires had traversed the road we had to repass in returning, leaving the whole country in flames. As we drove along, great burning trees came toppling and crashing down on both sides, and some fell directly across our track, compelling us to make a *détour* in the Bush, where we feared the horses would burn their feet in the hot ashes, the terror of the poor animals increasing our own peril not a little. The air was like a furnace and thick with smoke, and fiery fragments of leaves, sticks, and bark were falling around and about us. I have not often felt more awed by any impending danger than during that scorching drive, nor more devoutly thankful for our preservation than when at last we emerged from the terrible dominions of the tyrannical Fire King, into the cool olive-green avenue of our forest road, and once more breathed air instead of smoke.

Mr. Meredith was absent from home when the bush fires in the near vicinity of Poyston seemed to me threatening its speedy destruction, and my intense terror was consequently uncomforted by his better experience; nor was I aware at the time, that he had, before leaving home, taken the wise precaution of burning the ferns over the whole of a

wide span of forest land around us, although I knew it had been partially done. The appearance of the rapidly-advancing fire was indeed such as to appal a stouter heart than mine, when at last, after many disregarded entreaties from my frightened women servants, I went out to look at it. Overhead, a thick black rolling cloud of fire-speckled smoke shut out the sky; and behind, the mighty array of flames whence it came rose high over the tallest of those giant trees, in tongues and spears of red blaze, bright even at noonday, and wreathed about the trunks and branches, devouring every leaf and fragment of bark as it went crackling on. The wind blew the fire directly towards our apparently devoted house, which, almost wholly composed of resinous wood, dry as tinder after the summer's heat, would have burnt like touch-paper.

I began to count up our carpets and blankets, intending to have them all soaked in the brook, and laid over the roof to prevent its becoming ignited by the falling flakes, and I had our small stock of gunpowder ready to bury in the garden, under the camp oven, if the danger increased. The two men servants went to beat out the fire so as to prevent its crossing a narrow gully at the

back of our inclosure, and I dispatched George and the nurse-girl to the police station for more men to help them, the fire meanwhile evidently making rapid progress, and the horrid crackling becoming louder and nearer.

A reinforcement from the station, of the district constable and two others, enabled our party to spread out so as to keep a wide extent of the ground-fire under control, but not without having their clothes burned in the effort, and I had my share of active business in serving out tea, grog, and flannel shirts. A sudden shift of the wind providentially aided our endeavours, and, before night, the body of the fire was raging onwards in a different direction, but still leaving so much behind as to render a night-watch requisite; nor did we feel quite safe until the following evening, when the alarming appearances had to a great degree subsided.

These extensive fires must no doubt destroy great numbers of snakes; and if they were of no other service, that alone would plead their pardon for many mischievous deeds. The poor opossums, too, I fear, must suffer martyrdom in crowds, and quantities of small vermin and insects; but the

chief service of the bush fires is, the rapid and wholesome consumption of heaps of vegetable matter, that would otherwise accumulate to excess on such rich damp soil, and, in their slow process of decomposition, fill the air with unhealthy vapours.



CHAPTER XIX.

Resignation. — Removal. — Voyage. — Contrary Breeze. — Great Peril.
—Anchor at George Town.—Overland Journey to Swan Port.
—Riversdale. — Improvements. — The Veranda. — Pigeons and
Fowls.—Plenty without Profit.—Arrival of the Harriet.—Con-
clusion.

THE apparently uncertain continuance of all police appointments in the colony, and the strong inducements we had to return to Swan Port, at length decided us in favour of a removal from Port Sorell. Mr. Meredith sent in his resignation of the police magistracy accordingly, and had the gratification of receiving, both from his Excellency Lieutenant-Governor Sir. W. T. Denison, and from the Chief Police Magistrate, flattering testimonies of their high estimation and approval of his past services, and kind expressions of regret that they were to cease.

As we had to transport ourselves, children, and servants; together with our furniture, horses, dogs, bees, favourite fowls, and other matters—a very

menagerie of clancjumphry—Mr. Meredith engaged our graceful friend the “Harriet” schooner to convey us direct to Swan Port, all but the horses, which were sent overland with the groom; my own especial gray Arab and her pretty foal having been carefully taken across previously.

Mr. Meredith’s successor at Port Sorell gladly agreed to purchase our house, land, &c.; our preparations for departure were, therefore, very speedily effected, although not without many regrets at leaving our comfortable home, and its most beautiful sea-view, which, so far from becoming indifferent to us, by long use, seemed ever to acquire some new charm.

Yet, having once rooted ourselves up, ready for a transplantation, delays became provoking, and after waiting two days on board, and receiving more “last visits” from the few valued friends we were leaving behind, we finally set sail, on a day universally considered of ill omen—in seafaring matters, at least—on *Friday* evening, February 22, 1848. Our good neighbour, the builder and owner of the vessel, had at the eleventh hour suddenly relinquished his intention of going with us, and left the command to a very

unworthy representative, a careless, lazy fellow, lately hired, whose chief vocation seemed to be dozing and smoking, and who could not even rouse himself enough to get out of the port at high water, but dawdled about on shore until we very narrowly escaped another night's detention, and, by some mismanagement in the narrowest and most dangerous part of the intricate channel amongst the reefs and islands, were, for a short time, in considerable peril.

The following morning, when Mr. Meredith went on deck, hoping to find that we had made good progress during the night, as we had had a fair breeze the evening before,—what was his annoyance to discern that our lazy “skipper” had afterwards hove the vessel to, and gone to sleep, during the greater part of the night, and so lost us at least thirty or forty miles of our voyage.

By the time I thought of rising we were making tolerable way through the Straits, and the vessel's motion had become so unpleasantly lively, that I found it desirable to make my ascent to the deck as quickly as possible, and try to ward off the approaching return of indisposition. My nursemaid, as a matter of course, was totally useless, having

given herself up a voluntary, or at all events an unresisting victim, to sea-sickness, and lay on the deck refusing all aid or remedy; so Mr. Meredith and our good old servant-man made their first essay in the nursery department by putting George and Charlie into their respective garments, but with an ingenious variation of back and front, tapes and buttons, which did infinite credit to their powers of invention. However, I was very thankful even for such aid, baby Owen's toilet being quite as much as I could safely undertake myself. The poor children were all very ill, and nothing but a most resolute determination saved me from sharing the same fate. I sat on deck all day, facing the fresh breeze, nursing the baby, and endeavouring to keep every thought busy with the passing clouds, the distant shore, the shoals of strange jelly-fish sailing along beside us, or anything, rather than suffer myself to admit the real truth, that I felt very far from well; and thus I continued all day without becoming worse.

The wind had been veering round for some hours, and at last settled to a strong breeze from the north-east, the most directly adverse point

for us. We passed "Tenth Island," and "Ninth," or "Gun-carriage Island," both of them barren and rocky, with low scrub and sand; and we were very anxious to reach "Waterhouse Island," where we could anchor safely, until a change of wind enabled us to weather Cape Portland, and then a breeze from any point of the compass, except due south, would carry us down the east coast to Oyster Bay. But the contrary breeze grew yet stronger towards night, and the vessel pitched and rolled horribly; the children suffered exceedingly, and poor Charlie, who had only recently recovered from a dangerous illness, became seriously ill and exhausted. The vessel, perfect as were her form and sailing capacities, had she been properly rigged, had only her fore and aft canvas, without square sails, and could not therefore be properly worked, even by skilful hands, whilst those we had on board were ignorant and helpless in the extreme.

A thick dark night, a contrary wind blowing half a gale, and a rocky reefy lee-shore, added to these disadvantages, made me petition my husband most earnestly for a run back to George Town, whence we could proceed overland with

our children; and, about eleven o'clock, I had the great, but I must confess unexpected, satisfaction of hearing that the order had been given, and we were soon hurrying back most rapidly, bounding before the gale towards the Tamar.

Knowing the inattention and recklessness of the "Master" (and which knowledge alone induced him to turn back), Mr. Meredith went on deck frequently to see that all was right. Once, as he stood gazing at the lighthouse, the point for which we were steering, he suddenly lost the light for a long interval, much longer than its period for revolving; then it reappeared, as if from behind some dark body, and again vanished. He then thought there must be an island which intervened, and asked the master if he knew how "Tenth Island" bore from us then?

"Oh, yes, sir!—We're leaving Tenth Island two or three miles on the port quarter."

Still my husband's suspicions were not at rest, and he took the man forward with him to look out again. By this time the vessel had rapidly approached "Tenth Island"—for such it was—the roar of the heavy surf was distinctly audible on the rocks, and there remained barely time to

alter our course, ere we swept close past the white gleam of the breakers on the cliff.

Had we driven onwards another two minutes in the direction we were going, not one of us had survived to tell the tale:—and with a devout and grateful heart did I most earnestly thank God for our signal deliverance from such a fearful death! I knew nothing of our danger until it was past, yet even then it was horrible to think of, and a right welcome sound was the rumble of the cable as we cast anchor at George Town, about one on Sunday morning.

Leaving our servant as our supercargo on board the “Harriet” to proceed to Swan Port when the wind served, we exchanged our cabin accommodation for snug apartments in a quiet little inn, and took our passage from thence on Monday afternoon in the steamer for Launceston. Her Majesty’s ship “Rattlesnake” had also arrived on Saturday night, and several of her officers and midshipmen were fellow-passengers with us in the steamboat.

A very pleasant voyage up the Tamar brought us in the evening to Launceston and our old hotel; whence, the following afternoon, we proceeded in

the mail to Campbell Town: and here began the real difficulties of our progress; our own good horses were comfortably grazing at Swan Port, and our peerless tandem cart lay dismembered in the hold of the "Harriet;" Mr. Meredith consequently made a voyage of inquiry the next morning in search of some strong vehicle that could be hired to convey us across the tier, a weary journey of nearly sixty miles, over the same rough track described in our pilgrimage to Port Sorell. A spring cart was at length obtained, and in it we proceeded on our slow and weary way. On the third evening of our journey, we arrived and halted awhile at our old home of Spring Vale, where we pressed one of our own stout horses into our service, and had the pleasure of being welcomed with a shout of delight from some of our old servants.

Our pretty cottage and the garden we had made and cultivated with so much care and pride, were unworthily tenanted by people who kept cattle and horses tethered to our choice fruit-trees, and had even erased the very form of the garden. Ragged disreputable sheds were set up in front, and slovenly brush fences behind; but I am happy to

say, it has since, in the occupation of our servants, under our own care, recovered much of its old neatness.

We made a pleasant sojourn at Cambria, our father's hospitable home, where we joined a right patriarchal assemblage of our own "kith and kin," then visiting there, and contributed our triad of boys to the merry group of grandchildren already met. We waited in anxious expectation for the "Harriet's" arrival, and as one week after another went by without intelligence of her, began to fear the worst for our valued old servant and our goods and chattels; but at length, after being driven about the straits in every direction but the right one, and paying involuntary visits to Circular Head, and other out-of-the-way localities, they contrived to cast anchor at Waterloo Point. As soon as our goods were landed, we took up our abode once more at Riversdale, where the commencement of a garden and orchard had brought a pleasant alteration on its former appearance and comfort, and where we have happily passed the last two years, busy in all farm matters, and in effecting every practicable improvement in all around us.

If these unpretending chronicles of our Tasma-

nian life seem to have lingered long in the recording, the perpetual enticements and beguilements of pleasant country occupation must bear the blame.

I could not possibly sit down quietly to write whilst I had my new garden entirely to remodel; and my anxious wish to leave all things in their places that were growing luxuriantly, so as to prevent too much evidence of newness, and at the same time to turn all the straight dirt-walks into gracefully curved turf ones, and to have a nice grass plat in front, was not very easily fulfilled, and cost me many runs up stairs, to contemplate the effect of my plans from the upper windows, before my clever old gardener and I could finally accomplish our task, the result now being highly satisfactory. A rustic wooden bridge leading to the orchard over a long fishpond in the garden is also one of our useful embellishments, and a thatched octagon summer-house, nicely placed beneath a fine old lightwood tree near the pond, will, when covered with creeping roses, ivy, jasmine, and passion-flowers, be very ornamental too, though at present the popular opinion of my taste in erecting it seems somewhat divided. A spacious veranda,

erected this summer along the front of the house, is the most important and essential addition of all; in this country, a good veranda is like an extra sitting-room; and, as an airy play-place for children on a warm or rainy day, is invaluable. We hope that some of our numerous families of swallows will take, or rather make, apartments in it next summer. Last year we were prevented from using our little boat for some months, although the Swan River is a delightful place for sailing, because a pair of confiding little swallows had built their nest in it, as it lay on the cross beams of a shed in the yard; and we could not dream of disturbing them till the young ones were grown up; then the boat was removed at once, lest another brood should claim our forbearance. Our veranda also forms my only substitute for a green-house, and in this climate such partial shelter is sufficient for the cultivation of most plants which must be wholly protected during an English winter.

From the front window of our dining-room, where I now sit, I look through the veranda over the grass plat and flower borders, now past their summer beauty, but still gay with noble hollyhocks, carnations, tiger lilies, and other autumn

flowers. A hawthorn hedge, and some graceful white-blossomed acacias, overhang two ranges of beehives, and conceal the paling fence, behind which passes the public road ; and beyond its other hedge, which is of gorse, lie sweet fields of clover, where the children's five pet lambs, and some favourite horses or cows, lead a luxurious life. Beyond these, again, is another gorse hedge, and other larger meadows, also fenced with a grand *chevaux de frise* of gorse, with some emerald bright English willows, forming lofty clumps on one side ; and in spring, giving us a pleasant home-like interest in marking their gradually deepening green, amidst the unchanging, dull, olive natives of the soil. Still again beyond flows the Swan River, a noble broad stream, sixty yards or more in width, but only visible to us from the house when a heavy flood spreads it over the meadows. On the opposite bank of the river lies a small farm, some of the whitewashed buildings just showing through a fine belt of trees ; and, bounding the whole, rises a woody ridge of steep rocky hills, only used as a sheep-run, and a very poor one.

From our side-window, through the passion-flowers, roses, and jasmine trained round it, and over

a gay little flower-garden below, we look up the public road, through the district. Opposite the entrance to our farm-yard stands our blacksmith's forge, whilst the mill, barn, stack-yard, cow-sheds, stabling, dairymen's cottages, and other buildings, fill up the side-view, and complete the extensive farm homestead. A dovecote on a high wooden pillar, safe from cats, but alas! not always so from hawks, is the abode of a large and handsome family of tumbler-pigeons; and a capacious yard beyond, well stocked with portly porkers, if not adding much to the ornamental character of the scene, gives by no means an unsubstantial promise of creature comforts. The common barn-door fowls are our most profitable kind of poultry, being more hardy and requiring less tending than most others. Turkeys were apt to wander away into the bush, where they are killed by the native vermin; Guinea fowls generally become wild; geese do not commonly thrive so well as at home; and ducks, very successful on some farms, are on others always carried off by disease.

From the two hives of bees which survived the long confinement of the voyage from Port Sorell (one hive died entirely, not having enough

honey to maintain them so long), we have now twenty-three, besides five that I have given away; and as we always drive the bees into a new hive when we take the honey, instead of smothering the swarm with brimstone, &c., our stock will soon be much larger. Whether the system of driving them into an empty hive would answer in the severe winters of England, I am not aware; but here, we perform the operation early in February (which answers to August at Home), and the bees collect a good store again before winter, and are even then rarely kept prisoners three days together without fresh food. Here the wide extent of English clover fields, and the long, long lines of glorious gorse edges, added to all the usual bush and garden flowers, seem admirably suited to the good little honey-makers. At Poyston the young swarms always gave us great trouble to hive them, from their tendency to fly swiftly away, and we lost many in this manner; but here we have now even left off performing the usual tin-dish-and-key concert, on the rising of a swarm, for without any interference they settle within a few feet, or at most a few yards, of the parent hive. One little bush of Chrysan-

- themums has had four swarms light in it within a month, and an old peach-tree has been similarly favoured; so that we have come to the conclusion that our bees are of peculiarly domestic and contented habits. The honey-comb of this year is much of it, not figuratively, but literally, as white as snow, and the honey colourless as liquid crystal, and of most delicate flavour.

Our fine dairy of beautiful cows, and our busy hives of good little bees, fully realize to us that scriptural picture of rural luxury — “A land flowing with milk and honey;” the only alloying drop of gall being the absence of all possibility of turning any of our surrounding abundance to pecuniary profit. Our fat grass-fed beef and small delicious mutton—equal to any “Welsh” ever •tasted—sell at *two-pence halfpenny* a pound; our wheat at 3s. the bushel; oats scarcely saleable at 1s. 6d.; and barley not in demand at all, most brewers here concocting their compounds from damaged sugar. Were colonial distillation permitted by the Government, it might become a profitable means of disposing of the surplus grain; but the fear lest the finance department should suffer by any diminution of the duties now

so largely paid on imported spirits, prevents that boon being accorded to the colonists; and they, unable to make the business of grain-growing pay its own expenses, must soon do generally, as so many have already done, lay down their luxuriant corn-fields in grass and clover, for the production of wool, cheese, and butter, and cultivate no more corn than their own establishments require to consume; and this in a country suited beyond most others for the production of excellent wheat and other grain. Wool seems the only staple commodity of the colony that can be made to pay even its expenses, and a short time since the prices for that were exceedingly low, nor have they yet become adequately remunerative to the sheep-farmer.

I have now retraced my Colonial life from first to last: from the period of my leaving England in 1839, to the present month of February, 1850; and as I fold up the last leaves of my Tasmanian chronicle, and wish my little book a safe voyage to

dear old England, I cannot ask or desire a more cordial welcome for it than that which greeted its predecessor; and I heartily hope it may be deemed deserving of one as kind.

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THE END.

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